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EZEKIEL

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THE
BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL.

INTRODUCTION.

The topics requiring to be treated in an introduction to this remarkable writing may be conveniently arranged under two main divisions—the person of the prophet, and the book of his prophecies. Under the first will fall to be noticed the life of the prophet, the characteristics of the times in which he flourished, the special mission with which he was entrusted, and the qualities he exhibited both as a man and as a seer; under the second will arise for investigation the arrangement and contents of the book, its composition, collection, and canonicity, its literary style, and the principle or principles of its interpretation, with a glance at its underlying theology.

I. Ezekiel—the Prophet.

1. *The Life of the Prophet.*

The sole information available for constructing a biography of Ezekiel is furnished by his own writings. Outside of these he is mentioned only by Josephus ('Ant.,' x. 5. 1; 6. 3; 7. 2; 8. 2), and Sirach's son Jesus (Ecclus. xlix. 8), neither of whom communicates any item of importance. Whether Ezekiel was the prophet's birth-name conferred on him by his parents, or, as Hengstenberg suggests, an official title assumed by himself on commencing his vocation as a seer, cannot be determined, although the former is by far the more probable hypothesis. In either case it can hardly be questioned that the appellation was providentially designed to be symbolic of his character and calling. The Hebrew term יְחֶזְקֵאל—in the LXX. and in Sirach Ἰεζεκιήλ, in the Vulgate *Ezechiel*, in German *Ezechiel*, or *Hezekiel*—is a compound either of יְחַזֵּק אֵל (Gesenius), meaning "whom God will strengthen," or "he whose character is a personal proof of the strengthening of God" (Baumgarten), or of יְחֱזַק אֵל (Ewald), signifying "God is strong," or "he in relation to whom God is strong" (Hengstenberg). As regards suitability the two interpretations stand upon a level; for while Ezekiel was commissioned to a rebellious house whose children were "stiff-hearted" (חִזְקֵי־לֵב) and "of a hard forehead" (חִזְקֵי־מֵצַח), on the other hand he was assured that God had made his face hard (חֲזָקִים) against their faces, and his forehead hard (חָזָק) against their foreheads (ch. ii. 5; iii. 7, 8). In respect of social rank Ezekiel belonged to the priestly order, being the son of Buzi,[1] of whom nothing further is reported, though it is interesting to note that the name Ezekiel had been borne by one of sacerdotal dignity as far back as the time of David (1 Chron. xxiv. 16). Unlike Hilkiah's son Jeremiah of Anathoth, who, as a priest of the line of Ithamar, sprang from the lower or middle classes of the community, Ezekiel, as a Zadokite (ch. xl. 46; xliii. 19; xliv. 15, 16; 1 Kings ii. 35), deriving from the superior line of Eleazar the son of Aaron, was properly a member of the Jerusalem aristocracy—a circumstance which will account for his having been carried off in Jehoiachin's captivity, while Jeremiah was left behind (2 Kings xxiv. 14), as well as explain the readiness with which in one of his visions (ch. xi. 1) he recognized two of the princes of the people. How old the prophet was when the doom of exile fell on him and the other magnates of Jerusalem can only be conjecturally ascertained. Josephus affirms that Ezekiel was then a youth (*παῖς ὢν*); but, if Hengstenberg be correct in regarding the thirtieth year (ch. i. 1), corresponding to the fifth year of exile, as the thirtieth year of the prophet's life, he must have been twenty-five years of age when he bade farewell to his native land. Other explanations have been offered of the date fixed upon by Ezekiel as the chronological starting-point of his prophetical activity. The thirtieth year has been declared to date from Nabopolassar's ascension of the Babylonian throne, which is usually set down at B.C. 625 (Ewald, Smend), or from the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, rendered memorable by the finding of Hilkiah's book of the Law (Hävernick), or from the preceding year of jubilee (Calvin, Hitzig); and manifestly if either of these modes of reckoning be adopted, the number thirty will afford no clue whatever to the prophet's age. All of them, however, lie open to objections as strong as those directed against the proposal to count from the prophet's birth, which, to say the least, is as natural a mode of reckoning as either of the others, and in any case may be provisionally adopted (Plumptre), since it practically synchronizes with the so-called Babylonian and Jewish eras above named, and harmonizes with indications given by the prophet's writing, as *e.g.* with his accurate knowledge of the sanctuary, as well as with his mature priestly spirit, that when he entered on his calling he was no longer a stripling.

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[1] An ingenious Jewish tradition makes Ezekiel to have been the son of Jeremiah, whose name it finds in Buzi, "the despised one."

The influences in the midst of which Ezekiel's youthful days were spent can readily be imagined. In addition to the solemnizing impressions and quickening impulses which must have been imparted to his opening intelligence and tender heart by the temple services, in which from an early age, in all probability, like another Samuel, he took part, for an earnest and religious soul like his, the strange ferment produced by Hilkiah's book of the Law, whether that was Deuteronomy (Kuenen, Wellhausen), Leviticus (Bertheau, Plumptre), or the whole Pentateuch (Keil, Hävernick), and the rigorous reformation to which, during Josiah's last years, it led, could not fail to have a powerful fascination. Nor is it likely that he remained insensible to the energetic ministry which, during all the twenty-five years of his residence in Jerusalem, had been exercised by his illustrious predecessor Jeremiah. Rather is there evidence in his obvious leaning on the elder prophet, revealing itself in words and phrases, completed sentences and connected paragraphs, that his whole inner life had been deeply permeated, and in fact effectively moulded, by the spirit of his teacher, and that when the stroke fell upon his country and people as well as on himself, he went away into exile, whither Daniel had a few years before preceded him (Dan. i. 1), inspired with the feelings and brooding on the thoughts he had learnt from the venerated seer he had left behind.

From this time forward the prophet's home was in the land of the Chaldeans, at a city called Tel-Abib (ch. iii. 15), or "hill of corn-ears," perhaps so named in consequence of the fertility of the surrounding district—a city whose site has not yet been discovered, though Ezekiel himself locates it on the river Chebar. If this stream (כְּבָר) be identified, as it is by Gesenius, Hävernick, Keil, and the majority of expositors, with the Habōr (חָבוֹר) to which the captive Israelites were carried by Shalmanezer or Sargon (2 Kings xvii. 6) upwards of a hundred years before, and the Habor be found in the Chabōras of the Greeks and Romans, which, rising at the foot of the Masian Mountains, falls into the Euphrates near Circesium—which is doubtful—then the quarter to which the prophet and his fellow-exiles were deported must be looked for in Northern Mesopotamia. Against this, however, Nöldeke, Schrader, Diestel, and Smend urge with reason that the two words "Chebar" and "Habor" do not agree in sound; that whereas the Habor was (probably a district) in Assyria, the Chebar is invariably represented as having been a river in the land of the Chaldeans, and that to this land the Judæan exiles are always declared to have been removed. Hence the last-named authorities prefer to look for the Chebar in a tributary stream or canal of the Euphrates, near Babylon, in Southern Mesopotamia.[1] In favour of the former locality may be mentioned that in it the prophet would have found himself established in the midst of the main body of the exiles from both kingdoms, to all of whom ultimately,

[1] This opinion can at least claim in its support that tradition locates Tel-Abib south of Babylon at a place called *Kesil*, where at the present day the prophet's grave is pointed out, as the tombs of Jonah and Nahum are in the vicinity of Nineveh.

although immediately to those of Judah, his mission had a reference; yet, inasmuch as the northern exiles might easily enough have been reached by the prophet's words without his residing among them, this consideration cannot be allowed to decide the question.

Unlike Jeremiah, who appears to have remained unmarried, Ezekiel had a wife whom he tenderly cherished as "the desire of his eyes," but who suddenly died in the ninth year of his captivity, or four years after he had entered on his prophetic calling (ch. xxiv.). Whether, like Isaiah, the first of the "greater" prophets, he had children, is not reported. If he had, it is clear that neither wife nor children hindered him any more than they hindered Isaiah from responding to the Divine voice which summoned him to be a watchman to the house of Israel. The summons came to him, as it had come to Isaiah, in the form of a sublime theophany; only not, as in Isaiah's case, while he worshipped in the temple, from which at the moment he was far removed, but as he sat among the exiles (in the midst of the *Golah*) on the banks of the Chebar. He was then thirty years of age. With few interruptions, he exercised his sacred vocation till his fifty-second year. How long after he lived it is impossible to tell. Not the slightest value can be attached to the tradition preserved by the Fathers and Talmudists that he was put to death by a prince of his own people on account of his prophecies, and was buried in the tomb of Shem and Arphaxad.

2. *The Times of the Prophet.*

When Ezekiel entered on his calling as a prophet in B.C. 595, the northern kingdom of Israel had for upwards of a hundred years ceased to exist, while the final overthrow of Judah, its southern "sister," was rapidly approaching. When Ezekiel was born, in B.C. 625, in the eighteenth year of Josiah, it seemed as if better days were about to dawn for both this land and people. Through the labours of Jeremiah, who had five years before been invested with prophetic dignity—in the expressive language of Jehovah, "set over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (Jer. i. 10)—and of Zephaniah, who probably commenced his work about the same period (Zeph. i. 1), seconded as these were by the young king's vigorous reformation and Hilkiah's finding of the book of the Law of Jehovah, idolatry had been well-nigh purged from the realm. Yet the moral and religious improvement of the people proved as transient as it had been superficial. With the death of Josiah from a wound received on the fatal field of Megiddo in B.C. 612, and the accession of his second son Shallum under the throne-name of Jehoahaz, a violent reaction in favour of heathenism set in. At the end of three months, Shallum having been deposed by Necho II., Josiah's conqueror, who still lay encamped at Riblath, his elder brother Eliakim, under the title of Jehoiakim, was installed in his room as vassal to the King of Egypt. Then followed, in B.C. 605, Necho's defeat at Carchemish on the Euphrates (Jer. xlvi. 1), with the result that Jehoiakim immediately thereafter transferred his allegiance (if he had not already done so) to the Babylonian sovereign, which, however, he preserved inviolate for not more than three years (2 Kings xxiv. 1), when, to punish his infidelity, Nebuchadnezzar's armies appeared upon the scene and bore off a number of captives, amongst whom were Daniel and his companions, all princes of the blood (Dan. i. 1, 3, 6). Whether Jehoiakim was eventually deported to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6), or how he met his death (Jer. xxii. 19), is not known; but, after eleven years of inglorious reign, he perished, and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who proved even a more despicable character and worthless ruler (ch. xix. 5—9; Jer. xxii. 24—30) than his father, and in three months' time was forcibly suppressed by his overlord (2 Chron. xxxvi. 9; 2 Kings xxiii. 8). Having, perhaps, found reason to suspect his fidelity, Nebuchadnezzar suddenly descended on Jerusalem, and put an end to his career of vice and violence, idolatry and treachery, conveying him, along with ten thousand of his chief people, among them Ezekiel, to the river Chebar, in the land of the Chaldeans, and setting up in his room his uncle Mattanias, whose name was, in accordance with custom, changed to Zedekiah (2 Kings xxiv. 10—17). This happened in the year B.C. 600. Zedekiah turned out no better than his predecessors. A poor *roi fainéant* (Cheyne), who was quite content to receive a "base" kingdom from the hands of the King of Babylon, and yet wanted honesty enough to keep his oath and covenant with his superior (ch. xvii. 13—15),—this wretched "mockery-king" had been five years upon the throne when Ezekiel felt divinely impelled to step forth as a watchman to the house of Israel.

The religious and political condition of the times, as well in Jerusalem as on the banks of the Chebar, may be gauged with much exactness from the statements of the two prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who exercised their ministries in these spheres respectively.

(1) As regards *the situation in Judah*, so far from the stroke of judgment which had fallen on Jerusalem having sobered its idol-mad and vice-intoxicated inhabitants, it only plunged them deeper into immorality and superstition. As their fathers from the first had been a rebellious nation, so continued they to be an impudent and stiff-hearted people (ch. ii. 4; iii. 7), who changed Jehovah's judgments into wickedness, and walked not in his statutes (ch. v. 6, 7), but defiled his sanctuary with their detestable things and abominations (ch. v. 11). Nor this alone, but high places, altars, and images were conspicuous "upon every high hill, in all the tops of the mountains, and under every green tree, and under every thick oak" (ch. vi. 13), as from the first it had been with their fathers (ch. xx. 28). Whether the picture sketched by Ezekiel of what he saw in the temple at Jerusalem (ch. viii.), when transported thither in vision, be regarded as a description of real objects that were standing and of actual incidents that were going forward in the sacred edifice at the time

of the prophet's visit (Ewald, Hävernick), or merely as an outline of ideal scenes and occurrences that were presented to his mind's eye (Keil, Fairbairn, Schröder), the impression it was meant to convey was that of Judah's and Jerusalem's total corruption, of their permanent revolt from Jehovah, of their total abandonment to and complete saturation with the wicked spirits of idolatry, immorality, and infidelity. As much as this was stated by Jehovah himself to the prophet, when he gazed in horror on the six executioners, who, in obedience to Divine command, went forth to "slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women"—"The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not" (ch. ix. 9).

As if, moreover, to show that this terrible indictment had not been overdrawn, the sins of Jerusalem were rehearsed by Jehovah in a special communication to the prophet in the seventh year of the captivity, which recounted a catalogue of abominations scarcely to be paralleled in any of the surrounding heathen nations—idolatry, lewdness, oppression, sacrilege, murder, amongst all classes of the population, from the princes and priests to the people of the land (ch. xxii.). Nor is there ground for hinting that perhaps this was a mere fancy sketch dictated by excited feeling on the part of the prophet, since it is too painfully confirmed by what Jeremiah reports as having been witnessed by himself in the days of Jehoiachin, immediately before the deportation of that monarch and the flower of his nobility: "The land is full of adulterers; . . . both prophet and priest are profane; in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the Lord. . . . I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah" (Jer. xxiii. 10—14). And that no change for the better was wrought by that terrible visitation upon the hearts of the people that remained behind in Jerusalem and Judah as Zedekiah's subjects, was further revealed to the prophet by the vision of the two baskets of figs, of which those in the one basket, representing Zedekiah's subjects, were so bad that they could not be eaten (Jer. xxiv. 8)—a similitude which more than endorses the truth set forth in Ezekiel's parable of the worthless vine (ch. xv.). In point of fact, so utterly had Zedekiah's subjects misconstrued the reason and purport of that calamity which had sent their countrymen into exile, that they began mistakenly to flatter themselves that, while their banished brethren had probably been justly enough punished for their iniquities, they, the remnant who had been spared, were the special favourites of Heaven, to whom the land was given for a possession (ch. xi. 15)—an hallucination which not even the downfall of their city sufficed to dispel (ch. xxxiii. 24). So far from dreading that a time might come when they would be ejected from the land like their expatriated kinsmen, they confidently assured one another they had seen the last of Nebuchadnezzar's armies, and that, even if they had not, their city was impregnable (ch. xi. 3). In vain Jeremiah told them their city's fate was sealed—that both they and Zedekiah their king should be delivered up into Nebuchadnezzar's hands (Jer. xxi. 7; xxiv, 8—10; xxxii. 3—5; xxxiv. 2—3); their princes and prophets encouraged them in the delusion that they should not serve the King of Babylon (Jer. xxvii. 9). In Zedekiah's fourth year, exactly a twelvemonth before Ezekiel's stepping forth as a prophet, one of these false prophets—"lower," or "fallen prophets," as Cheyne prefers to call them, regarding them as "honest though misguided enthusiasts"—Hananiah by name, announced in the temple, before the priests and all the people, as well as in Jeremiah's hearing, that within two full years Jehovah would break the yoke of the King of Babylon from off the neck of all the nations (Jer. xxviii. 1—4). To such a vaticination he had probably been moved by the arrival shortly before of an embassy from the Kings of Edom, Moab and the Ammonites, Tyre and Zidon, which had for its object the formation of a league against the eastern conqueror (Jer. xxvii. 3), and which seemingly had so far succeeded as to draw into its meshes the weak Judæan sovereign, and to excite among the unreflecting populace wild expectations of a speedy deliverance from the yoke of Babylon. These expectations, however, were doomed to disappointment. So far from Hananiah's vain-glorious announcement coming true, was Jeremiah's instantaneous rejoinder, within a brief space the easy yoke of wood the nation then bore would be exchanged for one of iron, which moreover Hananiah himself would not behold, since in that year he should die for having taught rebellion against the Lord (Jer. xxviii. 16). Yet the ferment occasioned by Hananiah's prediction did not cease, but spread beyond the bounds of Palestine, till it reached the banks of the Chebar and penetrated to the palace of the king. "The valiant son of Nabopolassar," who seldom dallied with incipient revolt, but usually pounced upon his victims in the midst of their treasonable projects, would speedily have crushed the new alliance, and with it Zedekiah, had not Zedekiah, fearing an evil fate, taken time by the forelock and despatched an embassy to Babylon (Jer. xxix. 3), if he did not afterwards proceed thither himself (Jer. li. 59), to give to his offended suzerain assurances of continued loyalty. How much of truth such assurances contained was not long in appearing, as five years later he broke into open revolt against the King of Babylon (2 Kings xxiv. 20), leaguing himself with Tyre and Ammon, and calling in the aid of Hophra, or Apries, of Egypt (ch. xvii. 15), who promised him "much horses and people." With that rapidity of movement which characterized "the favourite of Merodach," as it has distinguished all great generals, the troops of Babylon were on the march, and stood in front of Jerusalem before the war-chariots of Hophra could be mustered; and although for a time, when these latter did arrive, the Chaldean soldiers were compelled to raise the siege, it was only to return after Hophra's defeat or retreat—it is uncertain which—to invest the city with stricter closeness than before. After a siege of eighteen months, the supposed impregnable fortress fell. Zedekiah, who with his court had precipitately fled from the palace, was captured in the plains of Jericho and conducted to the presence of his conqueror at Riblath, who cruelly massacred his sons and his nobles before his eyes, blinded himself, bound him with chains, and carried him to Babylon, thus unconsciously fulfilling both the word of Jeremiah uttered one year before, that "Zedekiah should speak with the King of Babylon mouth to mouth, and that his eyes should behold the king's eyes" (Jer. xxxii. 4), and that of Ezekiel spoken five years before, that Zedekiah should be brought to the land of the Chaldeans, which yet he should not see, though he should die there (ch. xii. 13). On the city's fall a massacre of its inhabitants ensued, pitiless and unsparing, realizing all the horrors suggested by Ezekiel's parable of a boiling pot (ch. xxiv. 2—5). A month after, its fortified walls were laid in ruins, its temple, palaces, and mansions, with "all the houses of Jerusalem," being given to the flames, and its population, such of them as had escaped both sword and fire, swept away to swell the company of exiles upon the Chebar, leaving only a handful of the poorest of the poor upon their native soil, to act as its vine-dressers and husbandmen, with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam as their governor, and Jeremiah as Jehovah's prophet by his side (2 Kings xxv.; 2 Chron. xxxvi.; Jer. xxxix., xl., lii.).

(2) *The situation on the Chebar* was, in some respects, different from what it was in Jerusalem. From the first, among the exiles there would doubtless be kindred spirits to Ezekiel, pious hearts who recognized in their banishment from Judah the judgment of Heaven upon an apostate people, who mourned over their own and their country's declension, and who, as by the rivers of Babylon they sat down and wept (Ps. cxxxvii. 1), remembered Zion, and longed for a restoration to its sacred precincts; but just as certainly there would be others, and these probably the larger number, who carried with them their old habits of idolatry, and showed as little disposition to abate their devotion to heathenism as their fathers had done before them (ch. xx. 30), or as their brethren were then doing in Jerusalem. Even at the moment when they pretended through their elders to be inquiring at Jehovah's prophet, they were setting up idols in their heart (ch. xiv. 4); when they listened to the prophet's preaching, whether he denounced their heathen practices and called them to repentance, or prophesied against them Heaven's judgments for their wickedness, they applauded his eloquence (ch. xxxiii. 32), and puzzled their heads over his parables (ch. xx. 49), but never dreamt of doing as he told them. In the breasts of both sections of the community there kept on slumbering delusive hopes of a speedy deliverance from exile, fostered on the one side by the secret conviction that Jehovah would not prove unfaithful to his chosen city and people, and, on the other side, by the unauthorized utterances of false prophets and prophetesses in their midst, who "saw peace for Jerusalem

when there was no peace," and "caused the people to trust in their lies" (ch. xiii. 16, 19). It was to meet and, if possible, to dissipate these baseless hallucinations that Jeremiah's letter was despatched by the hands of Zedekiah's ambassadors, counselling the exiles to settle down quietly in their new country, seek the peace of the city and empire to which they had been carried, and serve the King of Babylon, since not until seventy years rolled by would Jehovah cause them to return to their own land (Jer. xxix. 5—14); and although perhaps both parties in the *Golah*, the pious and irreligious, had they been left to themselves, might not have felt indisposed to acquiesce in the course recommended by the prophet—the one, prompted by that habit of obedience and submission to the Divine will which was not in them entirely extinguished, and the other, by the comparatively comfortable environment in which they found themselves, materially, socially, politically, and religiously (or rather, irreligiously), in the rich, powerful, pleasure-loving and idol-serving empire of Babylon—yet, as a matter of fact, they were not left to themselves, but were injuriously acted on by the false prophets in their midst, one of whom, Shemaiah the Nehelamite, actually went the length of sending back a reply to Jeremiah's communication, suggesting that the Priest Zephaniah should arrest and confine the prophet as a madman (Jer. xxix. 24—29); and so the dream kept on haunting them that the Captivity would not be long. It is even possible that Jeremiah's prophecy of Babylon's ultimate overthrow (Jer. l.[1]), which Seraiah had been commissioned to read in Babylon (Jer. li. 59—64), may have contributed to keep alive the delusion that after all the "orthodox" prophets had been right, and Jeremiah, the "renegade" and "heretic," in the wrong, and that before long the dreary period of exile would terminate; and when, as the years went by, Zedekiah seemed to be firmly established on his throne, and tidings came from the old country of the stout resistance Tyre was offering to the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, as well as of the projected alliance of Tyre and Ammon with Judah against the common oppressor, it was scarcely surprising that this delusion should gather strength, and that a large part of Ezekiel's fulminations should be directed against it. It was manifestly in close connection with Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, and in support of the policy it advised, that Ezekiel, in the fifth year of Zedekiah, stepped forth as a prophet of Jehovah.

3. *The Mission of the Prophet.*

The special task assigned to the prophet, rather than spontaneously undertaken by him, was in general to act as a watchman unto the house of Israel (ch. iii. 17 ; xxxiii. 7), by giving warning to the wicked man of the danger of persevering in his wickedness, and to the righteous man of the peril involved in turning aside from his righteousness. More particularly the prophet's duty should be fourfold—to beat down and dispel for ever the foolish hopes that had been excited in the minds of his fellow-exiles as to a speedy deliverance from the yoke of Babylon, by proclaiming the absolutely certain and positively near approach of Jerusalem's overthrow; to bring to light and expose the inveterate apostasy and incurable corruption of Judah's capital, and, indeed, of the whole theocratic people, as the all-sufficient justification both of the judgments that had already overtaken them, and of those that were still impending; to awaken in them individually a feeling of sincere repentance, and so to call out from the ruins of the old a new Israel that might inherit all the promises which had been given to the old; and when this was done, to comfort the sorrowing community of pious hearts with a prospect of restoration after the term of seventy years should have been fulfilled. In all these respects the mission of Ezekiel was distinct from the parts which had been assigned to his renowned predecessors, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as from that devolved on his illustrious contemporary, Daniel. Whereas Daniel served as a prophet of Jehovah to the mighty world-empire in which he was a high and trusted official, Ezekiel exercised the same function towards the exiles from Judah who were planted in the heart of that heathen land; and whereas Isaiah had been summoned to begin his official labours at the time when the final overthrow of Israel was first clearly made known (Isa. x. 1—6; xxxix. 6, 7), and Jeremiah saw the outbreak of that awful visitation which the son of Amoz had foretold, to Ezekiel fell the task of "personally introducing the rebellious house of Israel into its thousand years of trial in the waste of the heathen" (Baumgarten, in Herzog's 'Real-Encyclopädie,' art. "Ezechiel"). Or, to express the life-problem of Ezekiel more shortly, it was his business to interpret for Israel in exile the stern logic of her past history, and to lead her forth "through repentance unto salvation" (Cornill, 'Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 22).

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[1] Cheyne ('Jeremiah : his Life and Times,' p. 168), following Ewald ('The Prophets of the Old Testament,' iv. 232), who treads in the wake of Cölln and Gramberg, assigns this whole prophecy to a writer who flourished near the end of the exile, if not later; but Hitzig's argument appears unanswerable, that in language and style it betrays the hand of Jeremiah, while "chronological data confirm this result" ('Der Prophet Jeremia,' pp. 390, 391)

The *first* of the above-named parts of the prophet's calling he discharged, first by performing a variety of symbolic actions and rehearsing others he had witnessed, in which were represented the siege of Jerusalem (ch. iv. 1—8; xxiv. 1—14), the miseries to be endured by its inhabitants (ch. iv. 9—17; v. 1—11; ix. 7—11; xii. 17—20), the burning of the city (ch. x. 1, 2) from which (ch. xi. 23) as already from its temple the glory of Jehovah had departed (ch. x. 18), ending in the exile and captivity of Zedekiah and his subjects (ch. xii. 1—13); next, by delivering a number of parabolic or allegorical addresses, in which were depicted Jerusalem's rejection (ch. xv.) and Zedekiah's deportation to Babylon (ch. xvii. 20); and finally, by exhorting them in poetical compositions (ch. xix. 1—14; xxi. 8—17) and spirited narrations (ch. xxi. 18—27), in which the same melancholy events, the approach of Nebuchadnezzar and the desolation of Jerusalem, were foretold. The *second* he fulfilled by reporting to the elders who sat before him in his house, the visions Jehovah had caused him to behold of the image of jealousy and of the chambers of imagery in the temple at Jerusalem (ch. viii. 1—18), as well as of the princes who devised mischief and gave wicked counsel in the city (ch. xi. 1—21); by reciting in their hearing the story of Israel's original condition and subsequent apostasy, both in highly figurative (ch. xvi., xxiii.) and in plainly prosaic speech (ch. xx., xxii.); and by reproving both them and the people they represented for their own insincerity and apostasy (ch. xiv.). The *third* part of his mission he pursued throughout, never exulting in the lurid pictures he drew, either of Israel's sin or of Israel's overthrow, but always aiming at awakening in the breasts of his hearers a conviction of their guiltiness and a feeling of repentance; and although, while Jerusalem was standing, his endeavours only met with resistance and mostly ended in failure, yet there cannot be a doubt that after the city fell his words gained a readier access to his listeners' hearts, and were more successful in conducting the exiles to a better state of mind. The *fourth* and last part of his life-work, which became possible only when the city had succumbed and the people's hearts had been softened, he carried out by giving them in God's name the promise of a true Shepherd, who should feed them in place of the false shepherds who had neglected and destroyed them (ch. xxxiv. 23); by assuring them of the final overthrow of their old adversary Edom (ch. xxxv.), as well as of any new combinations that might arise against them (ch. xxxviii.); by illustrating the possibility of their political and religious resuscitation (ch. xxxvii. 1—14) as well as of their ultimate reunion (ch. xxxvii. 15—20); and finally, by depicting, in a vision of a re-erected temple, a redivided land, and a reorganized worship (ch. xl.—xlviii.), the glories of the future, when, at the close of seventy years, Jehovah should turn again their captivity. Into the proper method of interpreting this concluding part of Ezekiel's prophecy it is not necessary at present to enter, further than to say that it does not appear self-evident, as the newer critics, Kuenen ('The Religion of Israel,' ii. 114), Wellhausen ('Geschichte Israels,' p. 62), Smend ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' pp. 306, etc.), Robertson Smith ('The Old Testament in the Jewish Church,' p. 314), and others maintain, that the seer's aim in this part of his book—and, in point of fact, his principal intention as a prophet—was to outline a plan for the second temple and supply a programme for the post-exilic Church. At least, to cite the words of the late Dean Plumptre, "there is no trace in the after-history of Israel of any attempt to carry Ezekiel's ideal into execution. No reference is made to it by the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who were the chief teachers of the people at the time of the rebuilding of the temple. There is no record of its having been in the thoughts of Zerubbabel, the Prince of Judah, and Joshua the high priest, as they set about that work. No description of the second temple or of its ritual in Josephus or the rabbinical writings at all tallies with what we find in these chapters" ('Ezekiel: an Ideal Biography,' *Expositor*, 2nd series, vol. viii. pp. 422, 423).

As for the manner—the times, places, and methods—in which Ezekiel exercised his calling, considerable light is cast on this by the hints scattered throughout his volume. From these it appears that he never spoke or acted prophetically of his own proper motion, but always under the direct impulse of inspiration, either after the word of Jehovah had come to him (ch. i. 3; vi. 1; vii. 1; xii. 1, etc.), or after he had beheld a vision which, from its nature, he understood required to be communicated to the people (ch. iii. 22; viii. 1—xi. 25; xl. 2, etc.). Nor does it contradict this representation of the source of Ezekiel's predictions that he occasionally gave them first in answer to inquiries from the elders of his people (ch. xx. 1), as it does not follow that, though these appear to have made frequent visits to the prophet's presence (ch. viii. 1; xiv. 1), he could have addressed them without first obtaining permission from Jehovah (ch. iii. 1—4, 25—27; xxxiii. 22). Then, while it would seem that for the most part the prophet restricted his prophetic utterances to those who sought him out in his own dwelling (ch. viii. 1; xiv. 1; xx. 1; xxiv. 19), and certainly never undertook journeys to remote colonies of the exiles, it is by no means apparent that such discourses as recite Judah's and Israel's sins (ch. vi., vii., xiii., xvi.) or call to repentance (ch. xxxiii., xxxvi.), or justify Jehovah's procedure in dealing with his people (ch. xviii., xxxiii.), were not pronounced before public congregations; and if usually his prophecies were first spoken before being written, there is ground for thinking that some deliverances, as *e.g.* those relative to foreign nations (ch. xxv.—xxxii.) and to the temple (ch. xl.—xlviii.), were not published orally at all, but only circulated in writing (see p. xx.).

In addition to his mission to Judah and Israel, the prophet had a calling to fulfil with reference to the heathen nations by which God's ancient people had been surrounded and not unfrequently opposed, and this he discharged by composing the prophecies comprised in ch. xxv.—xxxii. Some interpreters regard these predictions as the commencement of the consolation Ezekiel was directed to offer to humbled Israel (see p. xv.); as if the prophet's thoughts were that Israel, though overthrown herself, should derive comfort and hope from the fact that, even while punishing her, Jehovah was preparing the way for her recovery by pouring out the vials of his wrath upon her foes. It is, however, doubtful if the prophet did not mean, along with this at least, to sound a note of warning to these foreign peoples who had in times past so often harassed Israel, and were even then exulting in her overthrow, as if the day and hour of their final triumph over her were at hand; that although Jehovah had visited her on account of her iniquities, he certainly did not mean them to escape, but rather intended they should read in Israel's doom the precursor and pledge of their own; for "if judgment had begun at the house of God, what should the end be" of those that did not belong to, but were the enemies, of that house?

4. *The Character of the Prophet.*

That considered simply *as a man* Ezekiel was a striking personality, who, had he never been called to prophetic functions, would still have made a powerful impression on his age and contemporaries, will probably not be denied. Endowed by nature with high intellectual capacity, with a clear perception, a lively imagination as well as a faculty of eloquent and arrestive speech, he possessed, it is obvious, in no small degree that education and culture which are indispensable to render natural endowments effective. Though not a scholar in the modern acceptation of the term, he had no slight acquaintance, not merely with the sacred books, institutions, and customs of his own people, as will afterwards be shown (p. xxv.), but also with the learning, ideas, habits, and practices of the world generally in the times in which he lived. To appropriate the language of Ewald, without endorsing it in every particular, "he describes the condition and circumstances of the nations and countries of the world with a fulness and historical vividness equalled by no other prophet. In his oracles concerning Tyre and Egypt it is as if he intended to present at the same time, in the shape of learned information, a full and complete account of these kingdoms as regards their position and relations to the world, so exhaustive, at the cost indeed of their artistic effect, are these descriptions designed to be" ('The Prophets of the Old Testament,' vol. iv. pp. 9, 10). Or, to cite the words of Smend, "To the predominantly practical tendency of his mind points his extensive material and technical culture. He understands the geography of his day. He possesses accurate knowledge of the markets of Tyre. Especially are precious stones and cloth-stuffs known to him. He is a skilled designer and calculator" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. xv.). So accurate, indeed, is his knowledge of surrounding peoples, that Cornill ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. xii.) surmises he must have been a diligent as well as observant traveller in his youth. Then, in combination with these well-cultivated mental abilities, he owned other qualities which are usually found in men who lead their fellows, whether in the department of thought or in that of action. He was distinguished in a rare degree by energy and decision of character (ch. iii. 24; viii. 10), by resolute and patient self-command (ch. iii. 15, 26; xxiv. 18), by intense moral earnestness (ch. xxii. xxxiii.), and by deep personal humility, which perhaps reflected itself in the frequent appellation "son of man" (ch. ii. 1; iii. 1; iv. 1, *et passim*); and while without these traits he might have developed into a powerful orator, which indeed he was (ch. xxxiii. 32), or into a poet, which he may fairly claim to have been (ch. xv. 1—5; xix. 14—21; xxi. 14—21), without aspiring to be the Æschylus or Shakespeare of the Hebrews (Herder), it was his possession of these that fitted him in an eminent degree to fulfil the calling of a prophet. Nor are indications wanting that Ezekiel was not destitute of the softer qualities of the heart. If he lacked the tender sensibilities of Jeremiah which frequently dissolved themselves in tears (Jer. ix. 1; xxii. 10), he occasionally manifested warm feeling, as when he deprecated the destruction of his countrymen by the divinely commissioned executioners (ch. ix. 8), and again as when he poured forth a threnody over the evil fate of the princes of Judah (ch. xix. 1, 14). That the bereavement which fell upon him in his thirty-fourth year occasioned him the most poignant grief, and would have evoked from his stricken heart audible and visible expressions of sorrow, had he not been enjoined "neither to mourn nor weep" (ch. xxiv. 15), is not difficult to see. Hence the view that Ezekiel was not so much a flesh-and-blood personality as a semi-etherealized puppet, which was moved hither and thither in obedience to Divine (or supposed Divine) impulse, must be unhesitatingly rejected.

That regarded *as a seer* Ezekiel—"the priest in a prophet's mantle," as Wellhausen styles him—was distinguished by scarcely less exalted qualities, becomes immediately apparent. Not only was his spiritual discernment of the highest order (ch. i. 4—28; ii. 9; iii. 23, etc.), but his soul's instincts were so attuned to the inner harmonies of righteousness and truth, that he had the clearest and most accurate perception of the moral and religious situation both in Judah and on the Chebar, as well as the finest and directest appreciation of what that situation required. The verdict of Smend, that "Ezekiel's judgment of Israel's past was without question wrong, that he interpreted the history according to *à priori* suppositions of his own, and that for the objective historical truth he had no sense more" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. xviii.), will hardly commend itself to those who have no preconceived theory of their own to buttress, and who are anxious only to reach such conclusions as are warranted by the facts of the case. Then it goes without saying that not only had Ezekiel a high conception of the nature and difficulty, responsibility and dignity, of the prophetic calling, but almost more than any other prophet lived, moved, and had his being in it, the prophecies he uttered being so spread throughout his twenty-seven years of active ministry as to leave him scarcely a moment free from its sacred duties and impressions. His fidelity both to Jehovah who appointed him, and to them for whose sakes he had been appointed to his calling, was hardly less conspicuous. That he either failed to understand his countrymen or judged them too severely, because naturally "accustomed to look upon the dark side of things," or, perhaps out of chagrin and vexation, "because he himself had been the victim of his people's error" (Kuenen, 'The Religion of Israel,' ii. 106), is a suggestion as unworthy as it is baseless. If he "showed not the least inclination to excuse the conduct of his contemporaries out of pity for their lot" (ibid.), the reason was that the judgment he expressed, besides being true and therefore impossible to be changed, was likewise Jehovah's judgment, and dared not be tampered with. Accordingly, with these convictions in his soul, it was not surprising that in the discharge of his sacred duties he should evince an invincible fortitude like that possessed by all great prophets, and in particular by his two illustrious contemporaries, Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Daniel in Babylon. Yet can it not be justly alleged that Ezekiel never spoke in accents of love and tenderness, since in addition to the already cited instances of sympathetic feeling which appear in his several discourses, throughout the whole of his book, and more especially the third part, which is devoted to the consolation of the exiled people, there runs a deep undertone of pity for the fallen nation. It was this feeling of pity which fitted him to be, what he was more than any prophet previously had been, a true shepherd of souls. Cornill finely utters this thought when he writes, "Whilst the earlier prophets make the people in their collective capacity the subject of their preaching, Ezekiel turns himself to individual souls; [in him] the prophet becomes a 'carer for souls.' We find in Ezekiel, for the first time in the Old Testament, a clear and definite example of that delivering, seeking love which goes after the erring, and brings back the lost" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' pp. 51, 52).

II. EZEKIEL—THE BOOK.

1. *Arrangement and Contents.*

(1) *Arrangement.* A glance into the Book of Ezekiel shows that the prophetic utterances composing it have not been thrown together at random, but set down in accordance with a well-considered plan. As the downfall of Jerusalem formed the middle point of Ezekiel's activity, so has it been made the centre of Ezekiel's book, the prophecies reported in the first twenty-four chapters having all been delivered prior to, while those recorded in the second twenty-four, at least mainly, were uttered after, that event. Again, if regard be had to the destinations of the oracles, two distinct groups emerge—one, a larger, addressed to Israel (ch. i.—xxiv.; xxxiii.—xlviii.), and another, a smaller, directed against foreign nations (ch. xxv.—xxxii.). Then the prophecies concerning Israel divide themselves into two main sections, both as to the times when they were spoken and as to the subject-matters of which they treat; those in ch. i.—xxiv. having been uttered, as already stated, previous to the fall of Jerusalem, and composed of threatenings and judgments, while those in ch. xxxiii.—xlviii. were published subsequent to that catastrophe, and held forth comforts and consolations to the stricken people. Hence a threefold division is distinguishable: ch. i.—xxiv., prophecies (of judgment) against Israel; ch. xxv.—xxxii., prophecies against foreign nations; and ch xxxiii.—xlviii., prophecies (of consolation) for Israel; and this division is for the most part recognized and followed by expositors (De Wette, Ewald, Kliefoth, Smend, Schröder, Wright), although many prefer to reduce the three parts into two principal sections, by either combining the second part with the first as an appendix (Hengstenberg), or connecting it with the third part as a preface (Hitzig, Hävernick, Keil, Cornill). One

expositor (Bleek) adopts a fourfold division by splitting up the third part into two subsections, ch. xxxiii.—xxxix., and xl.—xlviii.

The first part (ch. i.—xxiv.), consisting of prophecies of judgment concerning Israel, has been variously subdivided. Bleek ('Introduction to the Old Testament,' ii. 106) partitions it into twenty-nine sections corresponding to the number of its separate utterances; Kliefoth, excluding the introduction (ch. i. 1—iii. 21), into seven (ch. iii. 12—vii. 27; viii. 1—xi. 25; xii. 1—xiii. 23; xiv. 1—xix. 14; xx. 1—xxi. 4; xxi. 5—xxiii. 49; xxiv. 1—27); Hävernick into six (ch. i.—iii. 15; iii. 16—vii.; viii.—xi.; xii.—xix.; xx.—xxiii.; xxiv.); Smend into five (ch. i.—iii. 21; iii. 22—vii. 27; viii.—xi.; xii.—xix.; xx.—xxiv); Schröder into three (ch. i.—iii. 11; iii. 12—vii. 27; viii. 1—xxiv. 27); and Ewald ('Prophets of the Old Testament,' vol. iv. p. 22) into three (ch. i.—xi.; xii.—xx.; xxi.—xxiv.), representing "the three separate periods in which Ezekiel had felt called upon by important events to be more than usually active." Perhaps the simplest division is that adopted by Keil, Hengstenberg, and others, which forms four subsections according to the chronological notes furnished by the prophecies themselves; as thus: ch. i.—vii., which began to be spoken in the fifth year, in the fourth month, and on the fifth day; ch. viii.—xix., dating from the sixth year, the sixth month, and fifth day; ch. xx.—xxiii., at the head of which stands the seventh year, the fifth month, and the tenth day; and ch. xxiv., which was published on the ninth year, in the tenth month, and on the tenth day of the month. These several subsections again are resolvable into component parts, distinguishable by the well-known phrase, "And the word of the Lord came unto me," introducing each separate oracle communicated to or delivered by the prophet. In the first subsection the phrase occurs four, or, excluding the introduction (ch. i. 3), three times (ch. iii. 16; vi. 1; vii. 1); in the second, fourteen times (ch. xi. 14; xii. 1; xii. 8; xii. 17; xii. 21; xii. 26; xiii. 1; xiv. 2; xiv. 12; xv. 1; xvi. 1; xvii. 1; xvii. 11; xviii. 1); in the third, nine times (ch. xx. 2; xx. 45; xxi. 1; xxi. 8; xxi. 18; xxii. 1; xxii. 17; xxii. 23; xxiii. 1); and in the fourth, twice (ch. xxiv. 1; xxiv. 15); in all twenty-nine, or, excluding the introduction, 28 (4 × 7) times.

The second part (ch. xxv.—xxxii.), comprising oracles relating to foreign nations, divides itself into three subsections according to the subjects with which these deal. In the first subsection (ch. xxv.) are found prophecies against Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines, of which the date is uncertain, though they seem to have been spoken at the same time and before the fall of Jerusalem, most likely during the progress of the siege. The second subsection (ch. xxvi.—xxviii.) embraces five separate oracles, four against Tyre and one against Zidon, which began to be published on the first day of an unrecorded month in the eleventh year; and though it cannot be affirmed that the several oracles were continuously spoken, yet the probability is they were all uttered about the same period. The third subsection brings together six oracles which at different times were pronounced against Egypt, viz. two (ch. xxix. 1—16 and xxx. 1—19) proceeding from the tenth year, the tenth month, and the twelfth day; a third (ch. xxx. 20—26) from the seventh day of the first month of the eleventh year; a fourth (ch. xxxi. 1—18) from the eleventh year, the third month, and the first day; with a fifth (ch. xxxii. 1—16) from the first day and a sixth (ch. xxxii. 17—32) from the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of the twelfth year. Thus in this second part thirteen oracles are included, to which Kliefoth, in order to carry out his sevenfold division (14 = 2 × 7) adds the next oracle (ch. xxxiii. 1—20), which, however, rather serves as an introduction to the ensuing main division.

The third part (ch. xxiii.—xlviii.), consisting of prophecies of restoration for the fallen people, has also been variously divided. Kliefoth makes as many subsections as there are separate oracles or words of God, viz. eight. Ewald distributes the whole into three, setting forth the prosperity of the future, (1) as to its conditions and basis (ch. xxxiii.—xxxvi.), (2) as to its progress from the beginning until its consummation (ch. xxxvii.—xxxix.), and (3) as to its arrangement and constitution in detail in connection with the restoration of the temple and kingdom (ch. xl.—xlviii.). Schröder constructs two groups, which he denominates the renewal of Ezekiel's mission (ch. xxxiii.), and the Divine promises (ch. xxxiv.—xlviii.). Perhaps as natural a mode of division as any is that of Bleek, Hävernick, Hengstenberg, Smend, and others, who combine Ewald's first and second subsections into one, and so reduce the number to two, of which the first (ch. xxxiii.—xxxix.) was published in the twelfth year, tenth month, and fifth day, and the second (ch. xl.—xlviii.) in the twenty-fifth year, first month, and tenth day. If the introductory portion of Part I. (ch. i.—iii. 21) be set apart as a distinct subsection, then the paragraph (ch. xxxiii. 1—20) which introduces Part III. ought in the same fashion to be reckoned as a separate subsection, in which case the number of such subsections in Part III. would be three; but possibly in both cases it is better to include the opening verses in the first subsections. In the third part the number of separate oracles, or "words of Jehovah," as above noted, is seven (ch. xxxiii. 1; xxxiii. 23; xxxiv. 1; xxxv. 1; xxxvi. 16; xxxvii. 15; xxxviii. 1), which harmonizes with Kliefoth's arithmetical scheme of making the number of the oracles in the different parts of the book a multiple of seven, as without question the total number of "Divine words" in the book, 49, is divisible by 7; yet the scheme itself looks too artificial to have been deliberately adopted by the prophet as the ground-plan after which his literary material was arranged.

(2) *Contents.* These, having been already frequently referred to, need not be further detailed than by appending the following table, in which are set forth the several oracles uttered by the prophet, with the dates at which they were spoken, and the subjects to which they allude :—

PART FIRST.

Concerning Israel: prophecies of judgment. Ch. i.—xxiv.

Section First. Ch. i.—vii.

(Fifth year, fourth month, fifth day, B.C. 595.)

I. The calling of the prophet: Introductory.
  1. The sublime theophany. Ch. i.
  2. Ezekiel's commission. Ch. ii. 1—iii. 15.
II. The prophet's first activity.
  1. Appointed a watchman. Ch. iii. 16—21.
  2. Directed about his work. Ch. iii. 22—27.
  3. The siege of Jerusalem portrayed. Ch. iv. 1—v. 4.
  4. The four signs interpreted. Ch. v. 5—17.
III. The mountains of Israel denounced. Ch. vi.
IV. The final overthrow of Israel. Ch. vii.

Section Second. Ch. viii.—xix.

(Sixth year, sixth month, fifth day, B.C. 594.)

I. A series of visions.
  1. The chambers of imagery, or Jerusalem's corruption. Ch. viii. 1—18.
  2. The six executioners and the man with the ink-horn; or, the preservation of the righteous and destruction of the wicked in Jerusalem. Ch. ix. 1—11.
  3. The coals of fire, or the burning of the city. Ch. x. 1—2.
  4. The whirling wheels, or the departure of Jehovah from the temple. Ch. x. 3—22.
  5. The five and twenty princes; or the wickedness of the city leaders. Ch. xi. 1—13.
  6. The ascending cherubim; or Jehovah's withdrawal from the city. Ch. xi. 14—25.
II. Two symbolic actions.
  1. Ezekiel's removing; or Zedekiah's captivity. Ch. xii. 1—16.
  2. Ezekiel's trembling; or the terrors of the siege. Ch. xii. 17—20.
  3. The certainty of their fulfilment. Ch. xii. 21—28.
III. Two threatening discourses.
  1. Against false prophets and false prophetesses. Ch. xiii.
  2. Against the elders of Israel. Ch. xiv. 1—11.
  3. The inevitableness of Jehovah's judgments. Ch. xiv. 12—23.
IV. Similitudes and parables.
  1. Parable of the vine tree; or the worthlessness of Judah. Ch. xv. 1—8.
  2. Similitude of the outcast infant; or Jerusalem's abominations. Ch. xvi. 1—63.
  3. The allegory of the two eagles and a vine; or the fortunes of the royal house of Judah. Ch. xvii.
  4. The proverb concerning sour grapes; or Jehovah's equity defended. Ch. xviii.
  5. The lion's whelps and the vine—a lamentation for the princes of Judah. Ch. xix.

Section Third. Ch. xx.—xxiii.

(Seventh year, fifth month, tenth day, B.C. 593.)

I. The story of Israel's rebellions. Ch. xx.
II. A proclamation of approaching judgments.
  1. The sword against Israel. Ch. xxi. 1—7.
  2. The song of the sword. Ch. xxi. 8—17.
  3. The advance of Nebuchadnezzar. Ch. xxi. 18—27.
  4. The sword against Ammon. Ch. xxi. 28—32.
III. The sins of Jerusalem.
  1. The wickedness of the princes and people. Ch. xxii. 1—16.
  2. Their fearful doom, to be cast into the furnace. Ch. xxii. 17—22.
  3. No intercessor. Ch. xxii. 23—31.
IV. The histories of Aholah and Aholibamah. Ch. xxiii.

Section Fourth. Ch. xxiv.
(Ninth year, tenth month, tenth day, B.C. 591.)

I. The symbol of the boiling pot. Ch. xxiv. 1—14.
II. The death of Ezekiel's wife. Ch. xxiv. 15—27.

PART SECOND.

Concerning foreign nations: prophecies of judgment. Ch. xxv.—xxxii.

I. Against the Ammonites. Ch. xxv. 1—7.
  Against the Moabites. Ch. xxv. 8—11.
  Against the Edomites. Ch. xxv. 12—14.
  Against the Philistines. Ch. xxv. 15—17.
  (Date uncertain; probably same as above.)
II. Against Tyre.
  1. Her fall predicted. Ch. xxvi. 1.
  2. Her lamentation sounded. Ch. xxvii.
  3. Her king bewailed. Ch. xxviii. 1—20.
III. Against Zidon. Ch. xxviii. 21—26.
  (Date: eleventh year, — month, first day, B.C. 589.)
IV. Against Egypt.
  1. The judgment of Pharaoh—two oracles. Ch. xxix.
  (Dates: tenth year, tenth month, twelfth day; and twenty-seventh year, first month, first day.)
  2. The desolation of Egypt—two oracles. Ch. xxx.
  (Dates: tenth year, tenth month, twelfth day; and eleventh year, first month, seventh day.)
  3. The glory of Pharaoh. Ch. xxxi.
  (Date: eleventh year, third month, first day.)
  4. Lamentations for Egypt—two oracles. Ch. xxxii.
  (Dates: twelfth year, twelfth month, first day; and twelfth year, twelfth month, fifteenth day.)

PART THIRD.

Concerning Israel—prophecies of mercy. Ch. xxxiii.—xlviii.
(From twelfth year, tenth month, fifth day, to twenty-fifth year, first month, tenth day, B.C. 588—575.)

I. Ezekiel's commission renewed. Ch. xxxiii. 1.
II. The shepherds of Israel reproved. Ch. xxxiv.
III. Prophecy against Edom. Ch. xxxv.
IV. The mountains of Israel comforted. Ch. xxxvi.
V. The vision of dry bones. Ch. xxxvii. 1—14.
VI. The union of Israel and Judah. Ch. xxxvii. 15—28.
VII. Prophecies against Gog and Magog. Ch. xxxviii., xxxix.
VIII. Visions of the future restoration—
  1. Of the temple. Ch. xl.—xliii.
  2. Of the worship. Ch. xliv.—xlvi.
  3. Of the land. Ch. xlvii., xlviii.

2. *Composition, Collection, and Canonicity.*

The genuineness of Ezekiel has never been seriously challenged. The earlier attacks of Gabler, Oeder and Vogel, and Corrodi on its individual portions, equally with the contention of Zunz that, as a whole, it belongs to the Persian age, are dismissed by the best criticism as unworthy of consideration; while De Wette's opinion is endorsed by all competent scholars, that Ezekiel wrote down everything with his own hand. Even Kuenen, who suspects the historicity of several of its paragraphs, admits that "we possess in the Book of Ezekiel a review written by the prophet himself" ('The Religion of Israel,' ii. 105); in this agreeing with Bleek, who regards it as "tolerably certain that Ezekiel himself prepared this compilation, and that therefore no utterances are admitted into it which are not Ezekiel's own" ('Introduction to the Old Testament,' ii. 117). The only points with reference to which divergence of sentiment exists are the dates at which and the manner in which this compilation was formed—whether its various utterances were written down before or after they were published, and whether all or only some or none were orally delivered.

Examining these points in reverse order, it is probably less wide of the mark, with Bleek, Hävernick, Keil, and others, to maintain that Ezekiel's oracles were all orally delivered, than to assert, with Gramberg and Hitzig, that none were. Ewald's conception of the prophet as a literary person sitting in his study and writing "oracles" because of the felt decay of the prophetic spirit ('The Prophets of the Old Testament,' iv. 2, 9) cannot be sustained, if by this is intended that Ezekiel did not exercise his calling after the fashion of the older prophets, but restricted his efforts to the preparation of prophetic "fly-sheets." That some of his discourses, as *e.g.* those directed against foreign nations and those relating to the temple, may never have been spoken, but only circulated as written documents, is conceivable, though it is travelling beyond the evidence to allege that anything in either of these collections renders it certain they could not have been, and were not, read to the exiles. Smend, who holds the two parts referred to as free reproductions, and not at all as verbatim reports of what the prophet spoke, nevertheless concedes that the prophet "may have orally expressed the same thoughts" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' xxxii.). As to whether his "oracles" were committed to writing before being read or spoken to the exiles, or were first spoken and afterwards recorded, cannot be ascertained in the absence of the prophet himself, and in defect of information on the subject from his or another's hand; so that the one assumption stands upon the same footing with and is as good as the other. The sole questions of interest are as to whether the "oracles" were penned exactly as spoken or freely reproduced in such a style as to deprive them of all claim to complete accuracy; and whether they were written down at a time when the incidents and experiences, being fresh in the prophet's memory, could be easily and vividly recalled, or at a later period when, his impressions of what had occurred having considerably faded, the reminiscences of the past which floated before his mind's eye required to be touched up by poetic fancy and literary skill. The two questions hang together. The later the period, the less likely the prophet's recollection to have been fresh; the earlier the period, the more difficult to fix upon the prophet a charge of "great carelessness in carrying out of details" (Smend).

(1) With reference to the probable *date of composition*, the latest fixed

upon by Kuenen and Smend is that of the twenty-fifth year of the Captivity; and at this date all critics agree the passage (ch. xl.—xlviii.) must be placed. The only reason discoverable for holding that ch. i.—xxiv. were not composed before that year, or at least not before the destruction of Jerusalem, is the difficulty, on the contrary hypothesis, of getting rid of the supernatural or predictive element in prophecy. "One must allow," writes Smend, "that in ch. i.—xxiv. many a word stands exactly as Ezekiel spoke it; but, on the other hand, it is only literary fiction when Jerusalem's downfall is represented as still future, as in ch. xiii. 2, etc., and xxii. 30, etc. The prediction is generally in the strongest way influenced by the fulfilment; step by step there meet us *vaticinia ex eventu*, as in ch. xi. 10 and xii. 12. The passage ch. xvii. is throughout anachronistic, and the section ch. xiv. 12 generally first thinkable after the destruction of Jerusalem" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. xxii.). Nor can it be doubted that this conclusion is unavoidable if the premiss from which it is drawn be admitted, viz. that prediction, in the ordinary acception of that term, *vaticinium pro eventu*, is impossible. But a fair-minded critic must acknowledge that such a premiss is one to be proved rather than assumed, and that until demonstration is produced it will not be possible to assent to the soundness of the inference that, because certain passages predict the downfall of Jerusalem and the captivity of Zedekiah, they must have been composed after those events. Besides, with what truthfulness could Ezekiel have represented himself as having been commanded by Jehovah to foretell the overthrow of the Judæan capital and the banishment of its king, if in reality Jehovah had given him no such instruction, and if in point of fact he, Ezekiel, had uttered no such predictions? And how could he, Ezekiel, have had the effrontery to state, in the opening of his book, that he had been directed by Jehovah to speak to the people with his (Jehovah's) words, and yet in the body of his book show that he had written with his own? Clearly Ezekiel must in this case have been unmindful of Jehovah's charge, which he professed at least he had received, "Son of man, be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house."

(2) As to the *final collection* and possible revision of Ezekiel's prophecies, there is no need to call in the assistance of any hand but the prophet's own, the seeming disorder, or "want of arrangement," of which Jahn complained being perfectly explainable without having recourse either to a perplexed "transcriber," or to Eichhorn's amusing supposition of a lazy editor, who, having found two separate prophecies of diverse dates, written by the prophet for the sake of economy upon the same book-roll, set them down as he found them in juxtaposition rather than take the trouble to rewrite them. Whatever interruption of strict chronological sequence the book discovers is best accounted for as the handiwork of Ezekiel himself, who at times desired to group his prophecies by the subjects to which they related rather than by the dates at which they were spoken. If the book was first formed in the twenty-fifth year of the Captivity, B.C. 575 (ch. xl. 1), it was probably revised

two years later, when the brief oracle concerning Nebuchadnezzar was added (ch. xxix. 17—21).

(3) The *canonicity* of Ezekiel has seldom been impugned. That it found a place in Nehemiah's collection of "the acts of the kings, and the prophets, and of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts" (2 Macc. ii. 13), may be assumed. It appeared in the translation of the LXX. which was issued B.C. 280. Josephus ('Contra Apion,' i. 8) numbers it among the sacred books that in his day were regarded as canonical, though he also speaks ('Ant.,' x. 5. 1) of Ezekiel having written two books instead of one—in this probably blundering, as he does in sending off the prophet to Babylon along with Jehoiachin rather than with Jehoiakim ('Ant.,' x. 6. 3) or confounding together Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the former of whom wrote two books (Hävernick); or alluding to the present Book of Ezekiel, which may then have been recognized as consisting of two parts or volumes ('Speaker's Commentary'). The Talmud (trans. 'Baba Bathra,' f. xiv. 2) recognizes 'Ezekiel' among the books it specifies as constituting the canon. On account of seeming discrepancies between Ezekiel's law-giving and that of the Pentateuch, the canonicity of the former was for some time contested among the Jews in the last revision of the Jewish canon, after the destruction of Jerusalem (Derenbourg, 'Histoire de la Palestine,' p. 295); but, the difficulty having been removed, the book's right to a place in the canon was not disturbed, and was at length formally recognized in the Talmud (trans. 'Baba Bathra,' f. xiv. 2). In the Christian Church Melito's canon of the Old Testament (A.D. 172) and Origen's (A.D. 250) both acknowledge it.

3. *Its Style and Literary Characteristics.*

The verdict of Ewald will probably not be disputed by persons competent to pronounce an opinion on the subject, that as a writer Ezekiel "excels all former prophets in point of skill, beauty, and perfection of treatment" ('The Prophets of the Old Testament,' iv. 9). "It is true," adds the above-named eminent authority, "his style, like that of most writers of this later period, has a certain amount of prolixity, often very involved sentences, a rhetorical copiousness and diffuseness; still it rarely (ch. xx.) carries these defects to the same extent as Jeremiah in his later years, but generally collects itself with ease and assumes a finished form. . . . Moreover, his style is enriched with uncommon comparisons, is often at the same moment both charming and telling, full of new turns and surprises, and often very beautifully elaborate" (ibid., p. 15). It frequently exhibits the most imposing sublimity of thought and expression in close combination with the severest and least ornate narration (ch. i.—iii.). At one time it revels in a profusion of images, which seem to pour themselves forth from a highly excited fancy (ch. xxvii.); at another time it condescends to comparatively dry and uninteresting details (ch. xl. 6—49).

Now it rushes forward as if borne along upon the current of impetuous emotion (ch. xvi., xxxix.); again it halts and staggers as if overburdened with its message (ch. xvii.).

More particularly Ezekiel's style is marked by well-defined peculiarities.

(1) The first that arrests attention is its *strongly supernaturalistic flavour* The rationalistic conception of prophecy as a sort of superior natural endowment, intellectual and ethical, by which the seer, deeply pondering the past, contemplating the present, and peering out into the future, is able, through applying the eternal laws of righteousness, of which he has a clearer discernment than his less gifted contemporaries, to discover both the Divine will concerning those towards whom he feels impelled to act as a teacher and guide, and to forecast with a precision amounting almost to certainty the destinies alike of individuals and nations,—this conception of prophecy, while not to be overlooked, affording as it does the requisite psychological basis for the exercise of prophetic functions, will not account for the phenomena of which Ezekiel is full. In particular, Ewald's picture of the prophet as "translating himself, by the aid of the most vivid imagination, into all the familiar localities of Jerusalem" (ch. viii. 3—18), and repeatedly "turning his prophetic eye to the mountains of Israel, *i.e.* to his mountainous native land," as "in conformity with ancient prophetic rights bending his watchful prophetic eye upon the whole of Israel," and "discovering" (because it was impossible to do otherwise) "much matter for public treatment in the condition of Jerusalem during the first years of his prophetic labours," and as apprehending "the near or the distant dangers that threatened the chief city, the follies and perversities that prevailed therein, and finally the unavoidable ruin which became more imminent every moment,"—this picture, if intended to exclude all idea of direct supernatural assistance, and to reduce Ezekiel, in whom it is asserted the prophetic spirit was declining (!), to the level of an ordinary or even extraordinary man of genius, and his book to that of a composition setting forth his subjective meditations on the religious and political situation of his country and people, his reminiscences of the past, imaginings of the present, and forecastings of the future,—this picture is not one for which material support can be found in the prophet's writing. It is undeniably not the idea Ezekiel himself had of what it was he was setting down in his book. Even conceding that Ezekiel need not be supposed to have indited an exact, verbally correct report of what he preached to the elders and people (Cornill, 'Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 38), it is yet unmistakable that from the beginning to the end of his volume he desires it to be understood that the "visions" he describes, "symbols" he performs, and "oracles" he delivers, are Divine communications of which he has been constituted the transmitting medium. To represent the prophet's talk of "visions," "symbols," and "oracles," as also his repeated references to "ecstasies" and "Divine words," as belonging merely to the literary dressing of his thoughts, is to beg the question at issue.

(2) A second characteristic of Ezekiel's writing is its *highly idealistic colouring.* This reveals itself chiefly in the frequent introduction of visions, though likewise in the use of allegories, parables, and similitudes. That such a style of writing (and speaking) should have been adopted by the prophet was probably due to a variety of causes; as *e.g.* to his own poetic temperament, his absence from the Holy Land, to which many of his "oracles" referred, and the suitability of such imaginative discourse for impressing the minds of both hearers and readers. How far in the selection of his symbolism he was affected by Babylonian culture is differently answered by expositors, who guide themselves chiefly by the views they entertain as to the genesis of the prophet's writings and the importance they attach to the spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*), which formed his intellectual environment. Hävernick regards the whole book as having in its symbols "a colossal character which frequently points to those powerful impressions experienced by the prophet in a foreign land—Chaldea—which are here taken up and given forth again with a mighty and independent spirit" ('Commentar über den Propheten Ezechiel,' p. xx.). Were this so—and *à priori* it is neither impossible nor incredible—it would in no degree militate against the authenticity or inspiration of the record, but would simply prove, as Cornill excellently puts it, that Jehovah, in permitting Ezekiel to make use of heathen art and symbolism, "had only constituted the gods of Babylon his servants, as already Babylon's king had been an instrument in his hand" ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 30). Still, it is far from being conclusively established that Ezekiel was in any perceptible degree influenced in the selection of his imagery by his Babylonian surroundings, although his language, in its frequent Aramaisms, bears unmistakable traces of contact with the East, and although, to use the words of the late Dean Plumptre, "in the land of his exile his eyes must have become familiar with sculptured shapes which presented many points of analogy both to his earlier and later conceptions of the cherubim" ('Ezekiel: an Ideal Biography,' *Expositor*, 2nd series, vol. vi. p. 9). Hence the judgment of Keil, that "the whole of Ezekiel's symbolism is derived from the Israelitish sanctuary, and is an outcome of Old Testament ideas and views" ('Commentary on Ezekiel,' vol. i. 11), is deserving of respectful consideration—all the more that this mode of representing thought appears to have been common to the nations of the ancient East, and to have been the exclusive property of no one nation more than another (compare 'Speaker's Commentary,' iv. 23).

(3) A third distinctive feature in the writing of the prophet is its *eminently cultured diction.* In this respect, to which allusion has already been made (see p. xiii.), Ezekiel stands apart even from his two prophetic compeers, Isaiah and Jeremiah. "As the Prophet Ezekiel sprang from the highest aristocracy of the Israel of the day," writes Cornill ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 38), "so has also his style something aristocratic about it, in its carefully selected diction and in its massive and well-sustained representation, right

in antithesis to Jeremiah, the fiery and direct popular orator, whose careless and plain manner of address, but for all that with an elementary force, lays hold of and kindles [its hearers] as that of the eminently reserved Ezekiel never does." Whether, as Cornill supposes, he had in his youth visited the foreign countries he describes, it is certain his writing exhibits a remarkable acquaintance with them, as already has been pointed out (see p. xiii.); while his intimate knowledge of the works of his predecessors has arrested the attention of every thoughtful student of his pages. The prophets of the eighth century, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, as well as those of his own time, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, have contributed their respective quotas to enrich his composition. Specially noteworthy is the influence which seems to have been made upon him by the study of the last named of these "men of God." The following brief list of passages from Ezekiel and Jeremiah (taken from a larger list prepared by Smend) will reveal the nature and amount of this influence :—

Ezekiel.		Jeremiah.	Ezekiel.		Jeremiah.
ii. 8, 9	=	i. 9.	v. 6	=	ii. 10—13.
iii. 3	=	xv. 16.	v. 11	=	xiii. 14.
iii. 8	=	i. 8, 17; xv. 20.	v. 12	=	xxi. 7.
iii. 14	=	vi. 11; xv. 17.	vi. 5	=	vii. 32.
iii. 17	=	vi. 17.	vii. 7	=	iii. 23.
iv. 3	=	xv. 12.	vii. 26	=	iv. 20.

A comparison of these passages will show that, while in thought and expression, there is, less or more observable, a correspondence which may indicate, on the part of Ezekiel, an acquaintance with the elder prophet's writings, this correspondence is not so close as to warrant the conclusion that Ezekiel prepared his work by a process of selection from Jeremiah, as by Colenso, Smend, and others, Lev. xxvi. is declared to be essentially a composition made by culling words and phrases from Ezekiel.

A similar acquaintance of Ezekiel with the Pentateuch can be established, as the following examples will show :—

Ezekiel.		Genesis.
xi. 22	=	iii. 24.
xvi. 11	=	xxiv. 22.
xvi. 38	=	ix. 6.
xvi. 46	=	xiii. 10.
xvi. 48	=	xiii. 13.
xvi. 49	=	xviii. 20; xix. 5.
xvi. 50	=	xix. 24.
xvi. 53	=	xiv. 16.
xviii. 25	=	xviii. 25.
xxi. 24	=	xiii. 13.
xxi. 30	=	xv. 14.
xxii. 30	=	xviii. 23.
xxiii. 4	=	xxxvi. 2.
xxv. 4	=	xlv. 18.
xxvii. 7	=	x. 4.
xxvii. 13	=	x. 2.
xxvii. 15	=	x. 7; xxv. 3

Ezekiel.		Genesis.
xxvii. 23	=	xxv. 3.
xxviii. 13	=	ii. 8.

Ezekiel.		Exodus.
i. 26	=	xxiv. 10.
i. 28	=	xxxiii. 20.
iv. 14	=	xxii. 31.
ix. 4	=	xii. 7.
x. 4	=	xl. 35.
xiii. 17	=	xv. 20.
xvi. 7	=	i. 7.
xvi. 8	=	xix. 5.
xvi. 38	=	xxi. 12.
xviii. 10	=	xxi. 12.
xviii. 13	=	xxii. 25.
xx. 5	=	iii. 8; iv. 31; vi. 7; xx. 2.

Ezekiel.		Exodus.
xx. 9	=	xxxii. 13.
xxii. 12	=	xxii. 25.
xxviii. 14	=	xxv. 20.
xli. 22	=	xxx. 1, 8.
xlii. 13	=	xxx. 20.

Ezekiel.		Leviticus.
iv. 14	=	xi. 40; xvi. 15.
iv. 17	=	xxvi. 39.
v. 1	=	xxi. 5.
v. 10	=	xxvi. 29.
v. 12	=	xxvi. 33.
vi. 3, 4	=	xxvi. 30.
ix. 2	=	xvi. 4.
xi. 12	=	xviii. 3.
xiv. 8	=	xvii. 10; xx. 3.
xiv. 20	=	xviii. 21.
xvi. 20	=	xviii. 21.
xvi. 25	=	xvii. 7; xix. 31; xx. 5.
xxii. 7, 8	=	xix. 3; xx. 9.
xxii. 26	=	xx. 25.
xxxiv. 26	=	xxvi. 4.
xxxiv. 27	=	xxvi. 4, 20.
xxxiv. 28	=	xxvi. 6.
xxxvi. 13	=	xxvi. 38.
xlii. 20	=	x. 10.
xliv. 20	=	xxi. 5, 10.
xliv. 21	=	x. 9.
xliv. 25	=	xxi. 1—4, 11.
xlv. 10	=	xix. 35.
xlv. 17	=	i. 4.
xlvi. 17	=	xxv. 10.

Ezekiel.		Leviticus.
xlvi. 20	=	ii. 4, 5, 7.
xlviii. 14	=	xxvii. 10, 28, 33.

Ezekiel.		Numbers.
i. 28	=	xii. 8.
iv. 5	=	xiv. 34.
vi. 9	=	xiv. 39.
vi. 14	=	xxxiii. 46.
viii. 11	=	xvi. 17.
ix. 8	=	xiv. 5.
xi. 10	=	xxxiv. 11.
xiv. 8	=	xxvi. 10.
xiv. 15	=	xxi. 6.
xviii. 4	=	xxvii. 16.
xx. 16	=	xv. 39.
xxiv. 17	=	xx. 29.
xxxvi. 13	=	xiii. 32.
xl. 45	=	iii. 27, 28, 32, 38.

Ezekiel.		Deuteronomy.
iv. 14	=	xiv. 8.
iv. 16	=	xxviii. 48.
v. 10	=	xxviii. 53.
v. 10, 12	=	xxviii. 64.
vii. 15	=	xxxii. 25.
vii. 26	=	xxxii. 23.
viii. 3	=	xxxii. 16.
xiv. 8	=	xxviii. 37.
xvi. 13	=	xxxii. 13.
xvi. 15	=	xxxii. 15.
xvii. 5	=	viii. 7.
xviii. 7	=	xxiv. 12.

From these instances, which might be multiplied, it will be seen that between Ezekiel's language and thought and the language and thought of the Pentateuch sufficient points of contact exist to warrant the hypothesis that Ezekiel was at least acquainted with these books, and had made them his study—a very plausible hypothesis, considering who and what Ezekiel was. To go beyond this, and argue, either with Graf and Kayser, that Ezekiel wrote the law of holiness (*Heiligkeits-gesetz*) of Leviticus (ch. xvii.—xxvi.), or with Kuenen, Wellhausen, Smend, and others, that the middle portion of the Pentateuch, the so-called priest-code (Exod. xxv.—Numb. xxxvi., with exceptions), was not composed till after the exile, is to argue from insufficient data. Against the former of these inferences Smend ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 314) reasons forcibly, pointing out characteristic differences, linguistic and material, between Ezekiel and the portion of Leviticus in question; but the latter inference for which he contends is just as little capable of being placed on a solid foundation. The numerous allusions in Ezekiel to the priest-code and the other parts of the Pentateuch are quite as easily explained on the supposition that the whole Pentateuch was written before the exile, as that only parts of it (Deuteronomy and the Jehovistic history book) were written before, and parts of it (the holiness law and the priest-code) after.

(4) A fourth distinguishing feature in Ezekiel's style is its *well-marked originality.* This is not to be regarded as in any measure compromised by what has been advanced concerning the prophet's supposed dependence on the Pentateuch and the older prophets. Whatever assistance he may have derived from these compositions, he is not for a moment to be represented as having ransacked them, after the fashion of a modern author, sifting the works of his predecessors for choice quotations wherewith to embellish his own pages, but to have freely reproduced their teachings with the stamp of his own individuality upon them, after having first taken up and absorbed them into his own personality. If his symbolism, as already indicated, was mainly derived from Old Testament ideas and conceptions, those ideas and conceptions were combined in a way which was peculiarly his own. To cite again the words of Cornill ('Der Prophet Ezechiel,' p. 30), "Whilst in the earlier prophets we find, as it were, only timid attempts, in the Book of Ezekiel there prevails a truly titanic phantasy, which in inexhaustible fulness always creates afresh the most profound symbols, usually bordering on the extremest limits of the conceivable." Nor is the prophet's originality restricted to unusual images and combinations of thought, but, as is more or less characteristic of all powerfully energetic and creative minds, it overflows in the coinage of new words as well as in the employment of phrases and expressions peculiar to itself. Examples of the latter are the designations, "son of man," used by Jehovah in addressing the prophet (ch. ii. 1, 3, 6, 8; iii. 1, 3, 4, *et passim*), and "rebellious house" applied to Israel (ch. ii. 5, 6, 7, 8; iii. 9, 26, 27; xii. 2, 3, 9; xvii. 12; xxiv. 3; xliv. 6); the formulas, "The hand of Jehovah was upon me" (ch. i. 3; iii. 22; viii. 1; xxxvii. 1; xl. 1), "The word of Jehovah came unto me" (ch. iii. 16; vi. 1; vii. 1, etc.), "Set thy face against" (ch. iv. 3, 7; vi. 2; xiii. 17; xx. 46; xxi. 2), "They shall know that I am Jehovah" (ch. v. 13; vi. 10, 14; vii. 27; xii. 15, etc.), "They shall know that a prophet hath been among them" (ch. ii. 5; xxxiii. 33); and the clauses introducing Jehovah's utterances: "Thus saith Jehovah Elohim" (ch. ii. 4; iii. 11, 27; v. 5, 7, 8; vi. 3, 11; vii. 2. 5, etc.). Instances of the former are hardly less abundant. Keil ('Introduction to the Old Testament,' I., vol. i. 357, Engl. trans.) supplies a list of words peculiar to Ezekiel, of which the appended are a sample: (1) *Verbs:* בִּתַּק, "to thrust through" (ch. xvi. 40); דָּלַח, "to trouble" (waters) (ch. xxxii. 2, 13); טָעָה, in hiph., "to lead astray" (ch. xiii. 10); כָּחַל, "to paint" (the eyes) (ch. xxiii. 40); סָחָה, "to sweep away or scrape off" (ch. xxvi. 4); רָסַס, "to sprinkle" (ch. xlvi. 14). (2) *Nouns:* בָּזָק, "flash of lightning" (ch. i. 14); הִי, "lamentation" (ch. ii. 10); חַשְׁמַל, "polished brass" (ch. i. 4, 27; viii. 2); הֵד, "sounding" (ch. vii. 7); חַיִץ, "the wall of a house" (ch. xiii. 10); נֶקֶב, "a socket for setting a gem" (ch. xxviii. 13).

(5) A last peculiarity that may be claimed for Ezekiel is that of *simplicity.* Bleek denies this, and speaks of his style as being "very diffuse and

redundant"—a complaint which Smend re-echoes, characterizing it, on account of the above-mentioned phrases and formulas, as "monotonous," and even charging it with occasional "carelessness;" but the judgment of a writer in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica' (art. "Ezekiel") will probably commend itself to impartial students as a nearer approximation to the truth, that "Ezekiel's prose is invariably simple and unaffected;" and that "if there be any obscurity at all, it is really caused by his exceeding desire to make it impossible for his readers to misunderstand him."

4. *Principles of Interpretation.*

That the Book of Ezekiel must be interpreted exactly as other compositions of a mixed prosaic and poetic, historical and prophetical, literal and symbolical, realistic and idealistic character—that is to say, that to each part must be applied its own *criteria hermeneutica*, its own rules of exegesis or laws of interpretation—is self-evident. And in deciphering those portions of this work which are of a narrative, historical, poetical, or allegorical description, there is ordinarily no difficulty felt. The *quæstio vexata* is how the "visions," "symbols," and "predictions" shall be understood. Tholuck ('Die Propheten und ihre Weissagungen,' pp. 151, *sqq.*) distinguishes four different modes of interpretation, which he names the historical, the allegorical, the symbolical, and the typical; or, classing the last three together, the historical and the idealistic; and, so far as the Book of Ezekiel is concerned, the principal matters to be determined are whether its "visions" and "symbolic actions" were actual occurrences or merely transactions in the mind, and whether its predictions were purely "the product of reflective knowledge and thinking" or were traceable to a transcendental origin. The second of these questions, having already been alluded to, may be passed over, and a few words devoted to the first.

As regards the "visions," *e.g.* of the glory of Jehovah, of the temple at Jerusalem, and of the temple and city of the later times, it can hardly be questioned that what the prophet writes concerning these was based upon actual scenic representations that were present to his mind's eye during the moments of ecstasy he experienced, and were not simply idealistic creations of his own fancy, or rhetorical embellishments employed to set forth his ideas. Whether in any case what he beheld had a materialistic basis is not so easy to determine. Whether, for instance, he actually saw the glory of God or only a likeness of the same, and looked upon the veritable stone and lime building on Mount Moriah or merely an image of the same, seems outside the limits of exegesis to decide. Only the notion that "visions" were intended to "elucidate" the prophet's meaning shatters itself on the rock of their general obscurity.

So opinion is not unanimous whether the symbolic actions reported to have been performed by the prophet—as, for instance, "lying four hundred and thirty days on his right side over against a painted tile," "baking and eating bread of uncleanness," "shaving his head," etc.—should be understood as external (Umbreit, Plumptre, Schröder) or merely internal occurrences (Städlin, Bleek, Keil, Hengstenberg, Smend, Calvin, Fairbairn, 'Speaker's Commentary'). Undoubtedly there are circumstances in the accounts given of most of these extraordinary actions which seem to bear out the latter view; but just as surely the former is not without support. Yet in any case it seems absolutely indispensable to hold that there was more in the prophet's symbolism than simply the fruit of his own natural and unassisted imagination (Ewald). If he did not actually perform the actions above referred to in his own house, it at least seemed to him while in the ecstatic or clairvoyant state that he did. In addition to these were symbolic acts which there is no reason to doubt he did perform, such as the carrying out of his stuff from his house (ch. xii. 7), and his sighing bitterly before the eyes of his people (ch. xxi. 6).

5. *Theological Standpoints.*

Though presumably nothing was further from the prophet's mind than to compose a treatise on dogmatics, it is certain there is no book of the Old Testament in which the theological views of the author shine out with greater clearness than they do in this. So generally is this fact recognized, that Ezekiel has been pronounced the first dogmatic theologian of the Old Testament, and as such compared to Paul, who bears the same character and holds the same position in relation to the New (Cornill). An instructive essay of some dimensions might easily be prepared on the theology of Ezekiel; nothing more can be attempted in the closing paragraphs of this introduction than to outline the teaching it supplies on the subjects of God, the Messiah, man, the kingdom of God, and the end of all things.

(1) *God.* Whatever view of the Divine Being may have been entertained by Ezekiel's contemporaries in Jerusalem or on the banks of the Chebar, it is clear that to Ezekiel himself Jehovah was no mere local or national divinity, but the supreme and self-existent almighty (ch. i. 24) and omniscient (ch. i. 18) One, the Possessor of life in himself, and the Source of life to all his creatures, the highest of whom, the cherubim, acted as his throne-bearers (ch. i. 22), while the lowest, whirlwinds, storms, clouds, etc., served as his messengers. Infinitely exalted above the earth, clothed with honour and majesty, he was the Lord not alone of the celestial hierarchies, but also of all that dwelt beneath the skies, the supreme Disposer of events on this mundane sphere; the absolute Ruler of men and nations; whom not only Israel and Judah, but Egypt and Babylon, with all other heathen peoples, were bound to obey; who put down one empire and raised up another at his will; who employed a Nebuchadnezzar as his servant with as much facility as he could make use of a David or an Ezekiel. Though not represented, as in Isaiah's vision (Isa. vi. 3), as receiving the adorations of the cherubim in the midst of which he appeared,

he was nevertheless the Holy One of Israel (ch. xxxix. 7), whose name was holy (ch. xxxvi. 21, 22; xxxix. 25). Perhaps this was symbolized by the "brightness" round about the "cloud" (ch. i. 4, 27) in which the glory of the Lord appeared, but in any case it was proclaimed with awful emphasis by the withdrawal of that glory from the desecrated temple and city (ch. x. 18; xi. 23), as well as by the terrible denunciations against the wickedness of Israel and Judah which were put into the prophet's mouth. Then, arising out of this, was the inviolable righteousness of God, which by an eternal necessity with the whole fulness of his Godhead, set him apart from and opposed to sin, and demanded even of him that the sinner should be rewarded according to his works. This attribute in Jehovah it was that to Ezekiel's mind rendered the downfall of Jerusalem and the overthrow of her then surrounding nations inevitable. The former had become so degenerate, incurably vile, presumptuously apostate and defiant, while the latter had so persistently arrayed themselves against Jehovah as represented by Israel, that he, by the very necessities of his own nature, was obliged to declare himself against them both (ch. vii. 27; xiii. 20; xvi. 43; xviii. 30; xxvi. 3; xxix. 3). The God Ezekiel preached was One who could make no compromise with sin, who could by no means clear the guilty, whether individual or nation, and who would assuredly in the end, without pity, consign to well-merited perdition the soul that declined to forsake its sin. Yet was he a God of boundless grace, who had no pleasure in the death of the wicked (ch. xviii. 23, 32; xxxiii. 11); who, even while threatening judgments against the ungodly, sought to woo them to penitence by promises of clemency (ch. xiv. 22; xvi. 63; xx. 11), and who found the reason for his gracious acts in himself, and not at all in the objects of his pity (xxxvi. 32). In proclaiming such a God, Ezekiel showed himself exactly in line with the clearer and fuller revelations of the gospel.

(2) *The Messiah.* It has been said that, while the Old Testament prophets were unanimous in regarding Jehovah as the direct first cause which should introduce the Messianic times and set up the Messianic kingdom, they frequently diverged from one another in the view they gave of the instrumentality by which this splendid hope of the future should be realized; and in particular that, whereas in the pre-exilic period, when prophecy was at its height, the personal organ of God in the accomplishment of salvation was the theocratic king (Isa. ix. 1—7; xi. 1—5; Micah v. 2—7; Zech. ix. 9—16), in the post-exilic period, after the downfall of the kingdom, "the Messianic King falls into the background as a subordinate feature in the image of the future painted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel" (Otto Pfleiderer, 'Grundriss der Christlichen Glaubens- und Sittenlehre,' pp. 130, 131). So far, however, as Ezekiel is concerned, the Kingship of the future Messiah is rather strikingly emphasized. Besides being depicted as a "tender twig" taken from the highest branch of the cedar of Judah's royalty, and planted upon a high mountain, and eminent in the land of Israel (ch. xvii. 22—24), he

is represented as the coming One, to whom the diadem of Israel's sovereignty rightfully belonged, and to whom it should be given after it had been removed from the head of the "profane wicked prince" Zedekiah (ch. xxi. 27). If not alluded to, as Hengstenberg and Dr. Currey think, in the budding horn of Israel in the day of Egypt's downfall (ch. xxix. 21), he is expressly named Jehovah's servant David, who should be a Prince amongst Jehovah's restored Israel, and perform towards them all the functions of a true and faithful Shepherd (ch. xxxiv. 23, 24), ruling over them as King (ch. xxxvii. 24), and appearing in Jehovah's presence as their Representative (ch. xliv. 3). Should it be said that as yet in Ezekiel's Christology there is no idea of Messiah as a sacrificial priest or victim like the suffering Servant of Jehovah in the second portion of Isaiah (liii.), it should at the same time be observed that the ideas of "propitiation," "intercession," "mediation," are by no means foreign to the prophet's mind. If pressure must not be put upon the prince's "eating bread before the Lord" in the east gate of the temple (ch. xliv. 3), so as to make it signify more than the Messianic David's participation in a sacrificial meal before Jehovah as the representative of his people, it is nevertheless undeniable that the prince's appearing before the Lord is connected with the offering of sacrifice. Then the remarkable expression put into the mouth of Jehovah, that though he sought for he could not find a man who should stand in the gap before him for the land that he should not destroy it (ch. xxii. 30), and the equally strong asseverations that when once he had determined to cut off a people for its wickedness, though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, should be in the land, yet should they deliver only their own souls (ch. xiv. 14, 16, 20), render it apparent that Ezekiel understood well the thought, if not of vicarious suffering, at least of salvation on the ground of other merits than one's own; and in this again he showed himself a forerunner of the Gospel and Epistle writers of the Christian Church.

(3) *Man.* If the anthropology of Ezekiel is less developed than either of the two foregoing, it is yet sufficiently pronounced. As to origin and nature, man was and is God's creature and property (ch. xviii. 4). That Ezekiel believed in and taught the doctrine of man's paradisiacal innocence, seems a reasonable inference from the language he employs in depicting the pristine glory of Tyrus (ch. xxviii. 15, 17). The present fallen and corrupt estate of man is distinctly recognized. Man's ways are now evil and require to be abandoned (ch. xviii. 21—30), while his heart being hard and stony needs to be softened and renewed (ch. xviii. 31). For his wickedness he is and will be held individually accountable (ch. xviii. 4, 13, 18). On him, as an intelligent personality and free agent, rests the entire responsibility for the reformation of his life and the purification of his heart (ch. xxxiii. 11; xliii. 9). Yet does this not imply that man is able of himself, by his own strength, and without the gracious help of God, to work a saving change upon his soul; and so the very demand which with one breath he makes on man, the demand for a new heart, he in the next

proffers as a gift of God, saying in Jehovah's name, "A new heart will I give you" (ch. xi. 19; xxxvi. 26; xxxvii. 23); once more in this anticipating the Pauline doctrines of man's responsibility and inability, and of the consequent need of Divine grace to convert and sanctify the soul.

(4) *The kingdom of God.* Although this phrase never occurs in Ezekiel in the sense which familiarly belongs to it in the Book of Daniel (vii. 14, 18, 22, 27) and in the New Testament (Matt. vi. 33; Mark i. 14; Luke vi. 20; Rom. xiv. 17; 1 Cor. iv. 20), in the sense, viz., of God's empire over and in the souls of renewed men, the thought to which it points is by no means absent from his pages. To him, as to the other Old Testament prophets, Israel's vocation had been to be a "kingdom of priests" (Exod. xix. 6), and the gravamen of Israel's offence in his eyes was that she had totally revolted from Jehovah, turned aside from serving him, and given her allegiance to other gods—had, in short, become a rebellious house. Yet Ezekiel did not think of Jehovah's kingdom as so inseparably bound up with Israel as a mere world-power, that with the downfall of the latter the former should at once cease to exist. On the contrary, he conceived of the inner spiritual kernel of the nation as existing in the lands of its dispersion (ch. xii. 17), as growing by the constant addition to it of penitent and obedient hearts (ch. xxxiv. 11—19), as swelling out into a new Israel with Messiah as its Prince (ch. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24), as walking in Jehovah's statutes (ch. xi. 20; xvi. 61; xx. 43; xxxvi. 27), dwelling in the land of Canaan (ch. xxxvi. 33; xxxvii. 25), entering into an everlasting covenant with God (ch. xxxvii. 26—28), enjoying with him the closest fellowship (ch. xxxix. 29; xlvi. 9), and receiving from him a gracious outpouring of his Holy Spirit (ch. xxxvi. 27; xxxix. 27); in all this again foreshadowing the more spiritual conceptions of the New Testament Church.

(5) *The end.* That the prophecies contained in this book, and especially in its latter half, possess a decidedly eschatological character, has long been maintained. Besides having an outlook into the immediate future of Israel's restoration, by the majority of exegetes they have been regarded as extending their gaze as far as to Messianic times, and in particular to the "latter days." Nor is this conjecture destitute of weighty considerations that might be urged in its support. To say the least, it is suggestive that the New Testament Apocalypse, as if it had been deliberately framed upon the model of Ezekiel, begins with a theophany and closes with a vision of a city, through which flows a river of water of life, and in which there is no temple, because of being in itself a temple. Nor is this the whole resemblance between the two writings; but while the latter depicts a figurative and symbolical resurrection, the former describes a resurrection which is real, chants a dirge over Babylon (Rev. xviii. 11) that reminds one of the Hebrew prophet's lamentation over Tyre (ch. xxvii.), and represents the last struggle between the powers of evil and the Church of Christ (Rev. xx. 8) in like terms to those of Ezekiel (ch. xxviii.), as a war of Gog and Magog against the saints of God. Whether, on the ground of Ezekiel's

vision of the dry bones (ch. xxxvii.), it can be inferred that the prophet believed in and taught the doctrine of a future resurrection, or, on the strength of certain statements as to Israel dwelling again upon her own land, it ought to be concluded that the prophet anticipated a final ingathering of the Jews to Palestine, with Christ reigning as their Prince in Jerusalem, it would hardly be safe to affirm; it is much more credible to hold that much of the prophet's language in his last vision points to a condition of things which will be realized on earth first in a millennial period, when the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ (Rev. xi. 15), and finally in heaven, when the tabernacle of the Lord shall be with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God (Rev. xxi. 3).

LITERATURE.

1. Among the older commentaries on this book may be mentioned the following: Œcolampadius, 'Comm. in Ezech.,' 1543; Strigel, 'Ezech. Proph. ad Heb. verit. recogn. et argum. et schol., illustr.,' 1564, 1575, 1579; Casp. 'Sanctius Comm. in Ezech. et Dan.,' 1619; Hieron. Pradus et Jo. Bapt. Villapandus, 'In Ezech. explanatt. et apparatus urbis ac templi Hierosol. Comm., illustr.,' Romæ, 1596—1604; Calvin, 'Prælectiones in Ezechielis Prophetæ viginti capita priora,' 1617; Venema, 'Lect. acad. ad Ezech.,' 1790.

2. Among the newer, the following may be reckoned the more important: Rosenmüller, 'Scholia,' 2nd edit., 1826; Maurer, 'Commentaries,' vol. ii., 1835; Hävernick, 'Comm. über den Propheten Ezechiel,' 1843; 'Umbreit, 'Prakt. Comm. über den Hesekiel,' 1843; Hitzig, 'Der Prophet Ezechiel erklärt,' 1847; Patrick Fairbairn, 'Ezekiel and the Book of his Prophecy,' 1st edit., 1851, 2nd edit., 1855, 3rd edit., 1863; Henderson, 'Ezekiel with Comm. Critical,' etc., 1856; Kliefoth, 'Das Buch Ezekiel's übersetzt und erklärt,' 1864; Hengstenberg, 'Die Weissagungen des Prophet Ezechiel,' 1867, 1868; Ewald, 'Die Propheten des Alten Bundes,' vol. ii., 2nd edit., 1868; Keil, 'Commentary on Ezekiel,' Engl. trans., 1868; Schröder, in Lange's Series, 1873; R. Smend, 'Der Prophet Ezechiel,' in 'Kurzg. Ex. Handb.,' 1880; I. Knabenbauer (Roman Catholic), 'Comm. in Ezech.,' Paris, 1890; Dr. Currey, in 'Speaker's Commentary,' 1882; Von Orelli, in Strack und Zöckler's 'Comm.,' 1888.

3. Among works which, though not formal expositions, are yet valuable contributions to the literature on Ezekiel, may be placed, W. Neumann, 'Die Wasser des Lebens' (Ezek. xlvii. 1—12), 1849; Hoffmann, 'Das gelobte Land, etc.,' 1871; Ernst Kühn, 'Ezechiel's Gesicht vom Tempel,' 1882; C. H. Cornill, 'Der Proph. Ezechiel,' 1882; 'Das Buch des Proph. Ezechiel,' 1886; Plumptre, 'Ezekiel: an Ideal Biography,' in *Expositor*, vols. vii. and viii., 2nd series, 1884.

THE

BOOK OF THE PROPHET EZEKIEL.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

For the life of the prophet prior to the vision which this chapter relates, and which constituted his call to that office, see Introduction.

Ver. 1.—Now; literally, *and*. The use of the conjunction indicates here, as in Jonah i. 1, that the narrative that follows links itself on to something that has gone before. In Exod. i. 1 and 1 Sam. i. 1 it may point to a connection with the book that precedes it. Here the sequence is subjective. We may think of Ezekiel as retracing the years of his life till he comes to the thirtieth. Then, as it were, he pulls himself up. That must be the starting-point of what he has to say. Our English use of "now" is nearly equivalent to this. **In the thirtieth year.** I incline, following Origen, Hengstenberg, Smend, and others, to refer the date to the prophet's own life. That year in Jewish reckoning was the age of full maturity. At that age the earlier Levites (Numb. iv. 23, 30, 39, 43, 47) had entered on their duties. It is probable, though no written rule is found, that it was the normal age for the functions of the priesthood. In the case of our Lord (Luke iii. 23) and of the Baptist it appears to have been recognized as the starting-point of a prophet's work. Jeremiah's call as a "child" (Jer. i. 6; the word may, however, include adult manhood, as in 1 Sam. xxx. 17; 1 Kings iii. 7) was obviously exceptional. Other theories are: (1) That the years are reckoned from the era of Nabopolassar, the father of Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 625), dating from his throwing off the sovereignty of Assyria, and giving here the date B.C. 595 (Michaelis, Rosenmüller, Ewald, and others); but against this it may be urged (*a*) that there is no evidence that that era was in use in Ezekiel's time, and (*b*) that he nowhere else uses a double historical chronology. (2) That the years are reckoned from the discovery of the book of the Law in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 8; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14), as a turning-point or era in the history of Judah (Targum, Theodoret, Jerome, Hävernick), which would again bring us to B.C. 595. This view is, however, open to the same objections as (1). We have no proof that the Jews ever reckoned from that event, and Ezekiel did not want, here or elsewhere, another point to reckon from, as far as his people's history was concerned, than the captivity of Jehoiachin. **In the fourth month.** Both here and in ver. 2 the months are probably reckoned from Abib, or Nisan, the month of the Passover, with which the Jewish year began (Exod. xii. 2; Neh. ii. 1; Esth. iii. 7), so that the fourth month, known by later Jews as Tammuz, would bring us to June or July. **Among the captives** (literally, *the captivity*) **by the river of Chebar.** By most earlier commentators the Chebar has been identified with the Chaboras of the Greeks (now the *Khabour*), which rises in Upper Mesopotamia, at *Râs-el-Ain*, and falls into the Euphrates at Carcesium, a city which modern geographers distinguish from the Carchemish of the Old Testament. Recent critics, however (Rawlinson, Smend, and others), have urged that this was too far north to be in the "land of the Chaldeans" (ver. 3), or Babylon (2 Kings xxiv. 16), and have suggested that the Chebar of Ezekiel is the *Nahr-Malcha*, or Royal Canal of Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest of that king's irrigation works, to which, therefore, the name Chebar (*i.e.* uniting) would be appropriate. The identification of Chebar with the Habor of 2 Kings xvii. 6, to which the ten tribes had been deported (whether, with Rawlinson, we think of that river as identical with the Chaboras, or still further north, near an affluent of the Tigris of the same name), must, for like reasons, be rejected. The two names are, indeed, spelt differently, with initial letters that do not interchange. **The heavens were opened.** The phrase, not found elsewhere in the Old Testament, appears in Matt. iii. 16; John i. 51; Acts vii. 56; x. 11; Rev. iv. 1. **Visions of God.** The words admit of three interpretations: (1) Great, or wonderful, visions; as in the "mountains of God" (Ps. xxxvi. 6), the "cedars of God" (Ps. lxxx. 10), the "river of God" (Ps. lxv. 9); (2) visions sent from God; or (3) actual theophanies or manifestations of the Divine glory. Of these (3) is most in harmony with what follows, here and elsewhere, on the phrase (comp. ch. viii. 3; xl. 2; xliii. 3). Such a theophany constituted in his case, as in that of Isaiah (vi. 1), Jeremiah (i. 9), Zechariah (i. 8—14), his call to the office of a prophet. The visions may be thought of as manifested to his waking consciousness in an ecstatic state, and are thus distinguished from the dreams of sleep (comp. Joel ii. 28 for the distinction between the two—"visions" belonging to the young, and "dreams" to the old). The visions of Balaam, seen in a "trance," but with his "eyes open" (Numb. xxiv. 3, 4), and of St. Paul, "whether in the body or out of the body" he could not tell (2 Cor. xii. 2, 3), present suggestive parallels.

Ver. 2.—The fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. The date of this deportation stands as B.C. 599 (2 Kings xxiv. 8—16; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9, 10), and thus brings us to B.C. 595-4 as the time of Ezekiel's first vision. It was for him and for his fellow-exiles a natural starting-point to reckon from. It would have been, in one sense, as natural to reckon from the beginning of Zedekiah's reign, as Jeremiah does (xxxix. 1, 2), but Ezekiel does not recognize that prince—who was, as it were, a mere satrap under Nebuchadnezzar—as a true king, and throughout his book systematically adheres to this era (ch. viii. 1; xx. 1; xxiv. 1, *et al.*). About this time, but a year before, the false prophets of Judah were prophesying the overthrow of Babylon and the return of Jeconiah within two years (Jer. xxviii. 3), and the expectations thus raised were probably shared by many of Ezekiel's companions in exile, while he himself adhered to the counsels of the letter which Jeremiah had sent (Jer. xxix. 1—23) to the Jews of the Captivity. To one who felt himself thus apart from his brethren, musing over many things, and perhaps perplexed with the conflict of prophetic voices, there was given, in the "visions of God" which he relates, the guidance that he needed. They did not break in, we may well believe, suddenly and without preparation on the normal order of his life. Like other prophets, he felt, even before his call, the burdens of his time, and vexed his soul with the ungodly deeds of those among whom he lived.

Ver. 3.—The word of the Lord came expressly, etc.; literally, *coming, there came the word of the Lord;* the iteration having (as commonly in this combination in Hebrew) the force of emphasis. The phrase stands, as elsewhere, for the conscious inspiration which made men feel that Jehovah had indeed spoken unto them, and that they had a message from him to deliver. To give parallel passages would be to copy several pages from a concordance, but it may not be without interest to note its first (Gen. xv. 1) and last (Mal. i. 1) occurrences in the Old Testament, and its reappearance in the New Testament (Luke iii. 2). **Unto Ezekiel.** We note the transition from the first person to the third; but it does not give sufficient ground for rejecting either ver. 1 or vers. 2, 3 as an interpolation. (For the prophet's name, which appears only here and in ch. xxiv. 24, see Introduction; and for "land of Chaldeans," note on ver. 1.) **The hand of the Lord.** Here again we have a phrase of frequent occurrence, used of Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 46), of Elisha (2 Kings iii. 15), of Daniel (viii. 18; x. 10), of Isaiah (viii. 11), of St. John (Rev. i. 17). The "hand" of the Lord is the natural symbol of his power, and the phrase seems to be used to add to the consciousness of inspiration, that of a constraining, irresistible power. Ezekiel continually uses it (ch. iii. 14, 22; viii. 1; xxxiii. 22; xxxvii. 1; xl. 1).

Ver. 4.—A whirlwind came out of the north. What, we ask, was the meaning of this symbolism? In Jer. i. 13, 14 a like symbol is explained as meaning that the judgments which Judah was to suffer were to come from the north, that is, from Chaldea, upon the prophet's countrymen. Here the prophet is himself in Chaldea, and what he sees is the symbol, not of calamities, but of the Divine glory, and that explanation is, accordingly, inapplicable. Probably the leading thought here is that the Divine presence is no longer in the temple at Jerusalem. It may return for a time to execute judgment (ch. viii. 4; x. 1, 19, 20), and may again depart (ch. xi. 23), but the abiding glory is elsewhere, and the temple is as Shiloh had been of old (Ps. lxxviii. 60). Ezekiel was looking on the visible symbol of what had been declared in unfigurative language by Jeremiah (vii. 12, 14; xxvi. 6, 9). That the north should have been chosen rather than any other quarter of the heavens is perhaps connected (1) with Job xxxvii. 22, where it appears as the region of "fair weather," the unclouded brightness of the "terrible majesty" of God; (2) with Isa. xiv. 13, where "the sides of the north" are the symbols of the dwelling-place of God. For the Jews this was probably associated with the thought of the mountain-heights of Lebanon as rising up to heaven (Currey, on Ezek. i. 4, in 'Speaker's Commentary'), or with the fact that the "north side" of Zion (Ps. xlviii. 2), as the site of the temple, was the "dwelling-place of the great King." Parallels present themselves in the Assyrian hymns that speak of the "feasts of the silver mountains, the heavenly courts" (as the Greeks spoke of Olympus), "where the gods dwell eternally" ('Records of the Past,' iii. 133), and this ideal mountain was for them, like the Meru of Indian legend, in the furthest north. So, in the legendary geography of Greece, the Hyperborei, or "people beyond the north," were a holy and blessed race, the chosen servants of Apollo (Herod., iv. 32—36; Pindar, 'Pyth.,' x. 4; Æsch., 'Choeph.,' 373). Possibly the brilliant coruscations of an Aurora Borealis may have led men to think of it as they thought of the glory of the dawn or the brightness of the lightning, as a momentary revelation of the higher glory of the throne of God. (For the "whirlwind" as the accompaniment of a Divine revelation, see 1 Kings xix. 11; Job xxxviii. 1; Acts ii. 2.) **A great cloud, etc.** So far the signs of the approaching theophany were like those on Sinai (Exod. xix. 16, 18) and Horeb (1 Kings xix. 11). **With a fire infolding itself;** the Revised Version margin gives *flashing continually*. The Authorized Version suggests the thought of a globe of fire darting its rays through the surrounding darkness. **The colour of amber;** literally, *the eye*. The Hebrew word for "amber" (*chashmal*) occurs only here and in ver. 27 and ch. viii. 2. It is almost absolutely certain that it does not mean what we know as "amber." The LXX. and Vulgate give *electrum*, and this, in later Greek and Latin authors, has "amber" for one of its meanings. Primarily, however, it was used for a metallic substance of some kind, specifically for a compound four parts of gold and one of silver (Pliny, 'Hist. Nat.,' xxiii. 4, s. 23). Some such compound is probably what we have to think of here, and so the description finds a parallel in Dan. x. 6; Rev. i. 15. This, in its ineffable brightness, is seen in the centre of the globe of fire. One may compare Dante's vision of the Divine glory ('Paradiso,' xxxiii. 55).

Ver. 5.—The likeness of four living creatures. The Authorized Version is happier here in its rendering than in Rev. iv. 6, where we find "beasts" applied to the analogues of the forms of Ezekiel's vision. There the Greek gives ζῶα, as the LXX. does here, while in Dan. vii. 3—7 we have θήρια. In ch. x. 15 they are identified with the "cherubim" of the mercy-seat; but the fact that they are not so named here is presumptive evidence that Ezekiel did not at first recognize them as identical with what he had heard of those cherubim, or with the other like forms that were seen, as they were *not* seen, in the temple (1 Kings vi. 29; vii. 29), on its walls (2 Chron. iii. 7), and on its veil or curtain (Exod. xxxvi. 35). What he sees is, in fact, a highly complicated development of the cherubic symbols, which might well appear strange to him. It is possible (as Dean Stanley and others have suggested) that the Assyrian and Babylonian sculptures, the winged bulls and lions with human heads, which Ezekiel may have seen in his exile, were elements in that development. **The likeness of a man.** This apparently was the first impression. The "living creatures" were not, like the Assyrian forms just referred to, quadrupeds. They stood erect, and had feet and hands as men have.

Ver. 6.—We note the points of contrast with other like visions. (1) In Isa. vi. 2 each seraph has six wings, as each "living creature" has in Rev. iv. 8. (2) In Rev. iv. 7 the four heads are distributed, one to each of the "living creatures," while here each has four faces, and forms, as it were, a *Janus quadrifrons*. The wings are described more minutely in ver. 11.

Ver. 7.—Their feet were straight feet, etc. The noun is probably used as including the lower part of the leg, and what is meant is that the legs were not bent, or kneeling. What we may call the bovine symbolism appears at the extremity, and the actual foot is round like a calf's. The LXX. curiously enough gives "their feet were *winged* (πτερωτοί)." **Burnished brass.** Probably a shade less brilliant, or more ruddy, than the *electrum* of ver. 4 (see note there).

Ver. 8.—They had the hands of a man, etc. The prophet seems to describe each detail in the order in which it presented itself to him. What he next sees is that each of the four forms has two hands on each of its four sides. Nothing could supersede that symbol of activity and strength.

Ver. 9.—Their wings were joined, etc. As interpreted by vers. 11 and 24, two of the wings were always down, and when the living creatures moved, two were extended upwards, so that their tips touched, and were in this sense "joined." When at rest, these were let down again (ver. 24). **They turned not, etc.** We note the emphasis of the threefold iteration of the fact (vers. 12, 17). None of the four forms revolved on its ax-

The motion of what we may call the composite quadrilateral was simply rectilinear. Did the symbolism represent the directness, the straightforwardness, of the Divine energy manifested in the universe?

Ver. 10.—**As for the likeness, etc.** The Revised Version rightly strikes out the comma after "lion." The human face meets the prophet's gaze. On the right he sees the lion, on the left the ox, while the face of the eagle is behind. What did the symbols mean? (1) The human face represents the thought that man, as made "after the image of God" (Gen. i. 27), is the highest symbol of the Eternal. So long as we remember that it is but a symbol, anthropomorphism is legitimate in thought, and appropriate in visions; though, like theriomorphism, it becomes perilous, and is therefore forbidden (Exod. xx. 4; Deut. iv. 17) when it takes concrete form in metal or in stone. So Daniel (vii. 9, 13) sees the "Ancient of Days" and "one like unto a son of man;" and St. John's vision (Rev. i. 13) represents the same symbolism. (2) The lion had been the familiar emblem of sovereignty, both in the temple of Solomon (1 Kings vii. 29) and in his palace (1 Kings x. 20; 2 Chron. ix. 18, 19). So, in Gen. xlix. 9, it is the symbol of the kingly power of Judah, and appears with a yet higher application in Rev. v. 5; while, on the other hand, it represents one of the great monarchies of the world in Dan. vii. 4. Its modern heraldic use in the arms of England and elsewhere presents yet another analogue. (3) The ox had appeared, as here, so also in 1 Kings vii. 25, 44, in company with the lion, notably in the twelve oxen that supported the "sea" or "laver" in the temple. Here also we have a kind of sovereignty—the natural symbol of a strength made subservient to human uses. Both the lion and the ox, as we have seen, may have become familiar to Ezekiel as a priest ministering in the temple or as an exile. (4) The eagle was, in like manner, though not taking its place in the symbolism of the temple, the emblem of kingly power, and is so employed by Ezekiel himself in ch. xvii. 3, 7; while in Dan. vii. 4 the lion has eagle's wings (comp. Hos. viii. 1; Isa. xlvi. 11; Obad. 4; Hab. i. 8). In Assyrian sculpture Nisroch (the name is cognate with the Hebrew for "eagle," *nesher*) appears as an eagle-headed human figure, and is always represented as contending with or conquering the lion and the bull (Layard, 'Nineveh,' ii. 458, 459). The facts suggest the inference (1) that Ezekiel may have seen this symbol; (2) that over and above the general thought that all the powers of nature are subject to the government of God, there was also the more specific thought that the great kingdoms of the earth were but servants of his, to do his pleasure? The reproduction of the fourfold form, with the variation already noticed, in Rev. iv. 7, is every way suggestive, and it is, at least, a natural inference that the symbols had acquired a new significance through the new truths that had been revealed to the seer of Patmos; that the human face may have connected itself with the thought of the Son of man who shared in the glory of the Father; the ox with that of his sacrifice; the lion with that of his sovereignty over Israel, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. v. 5); the eagle with that of his bearing his people as on eagles' wings, into the highest heavens (Exod. xix. 4; Deut. xxxii. 11). The patristic interpretation, which finds in the four living creatures the symbols of the four evangelists (an interpretation by no means constant or unvarying—the lion being sometimes identified with St. Matthew, and the man with St. Mark, and conversely, while the ox and the eagle are uniformly assigned to St. Luke and St. John respectively), must be considered as the play of a devout imagination, but not as unfolding the meaning of either Ezekiel or St. John. In the later Jewish tradition the four forms are assigned, taking Ezekiel's order, to the tribes of Reuben, Judah, Ephraim, and Dan, as the "standards" (Numb. ii. 2) which they generally bore when encamped in the wilderness; but this is obviously outside the range of the prophet's thoughts.

Ver. 11.—**Thus were their faces: and, etc.**; better, with Revised Version, *and their faces and their wings were separate above;* i.e. were stretched upward, touching the neighbouring wings at the tip, and so "joined," while the other two covered the bodies and were never stretched (comp. Isa. vi. 2).

Ver. 12.—**Whither the spirit was to go, etc.** The description passes on to the originating force of the movement of the mysterious forms. The Hebrew noun may mean "breath," "wind," or "spirit," the meanings often overlapping one another. Here the higher meaning is probably the true one. The "Spirit" (as in Gen. i. 1; vi. 3; Ps. civ. 30; cxxxix. 7; Isa. xl. 7, 13; and in Ezekiel himself, *passim*) is the Divine Source of life in all its forms, especially in its highest form, moral, intellectual, spiritual. It is this which gave unity and harmony to the movements of the "living creatures," as it gives a life, harmony, and unity to all the manifold manifestations of the might of God of which they were the symbols. (On "they turned not," see note on ver. 9.)

Ver. 13.—**Like burning coals of fire, etc.** It may not be amiss to note the fact that the phrase throughout the Bible denotes incandescent wood. The nearest approach to its use by Ezekiel is in 2 Sam. xxii. 9, 13. For "lamps," read, with the Revised Version, "torches." Here the vision of Ezekiel, in which the living creatures were thus incandescent, bathed, as it were, in the fire that played around them, yet not consumed, followed in the path of previous symbols—of the burning bush (Exod. iii. 2), of the pillar of fire by night (Exod. xiii. 22), of the fire on Sinai (Exod. xix. 18), of the "fire of the Lord" (Numb. xi. 1—3), and the "fire of God" (2 Kings i. 12). Speaking generally, "fire," as distinct from "light," seems to be the symbol of the power of God as manifested against evil. "Our God is a consuming Fire" (Deut. iv. 24; Heb. xii. 29). The red light of fire has in it an element of terror which is absent from the stainless white of the eternal glory, or from the sapphire of the visible firmament. Lightning (comp. Exod. xix. 16; xx. 18; Dan. x. 6; Rev. iv. 5; viii. 5; xi. 19; xvi. 18).

Ver. 14.—Ran and returned. Compare the "to and fro" of Zech. iv. 10. The comparison implies at once suddenness (as in Matt. xxiv. 27) and overwhelming brightness.

Ver. 15.—Behold one wheel, etc. As the prophet gazed, yet another marvel presented itself—a "wheel" was seen. It is "by" or "beside" (Revised Version) the living creatures, and "for each of the four faces thereof" (Revised Version); *i.e.* as the next verse states definitely, there were four wheels. We may compare the analogues of the "wheels" of fire in the theophany of Dan vii. 9, and the chariot of the cherubim in 1 Chron. xxviii. 18.

Ver. 16.—Like unto the colour of a beryl. The Hebrew for "beryl" (*tarshish*) suggests that the stone was called, like the turquoise, from the region which produced it. Here and in Dan. x. 6 the LXX. leaves it untranslated. In Exod. xxviii. 20 we find χρυσόλιθος; in ch. x. 9 and xxviii. 13 ἄνθραξ, *i.e.* carbuncle. It is obvious, from this variety of renderings, that the stone was not easily identified. Probably it was of a red or golden colour, suggesting the thought of fire rather than the pale green of the aquamarine or beryl (see especially Dan. x. 6). **They four had one likeness, etc.** A closer gaze led the prophet to see that there was a plurality in the unity. For the one "wheel" we have four; perhaps, as some have thought, two wheels intersecting at right angles, perhaps, one, probably seen behind, perhaps also below, each of the living creatures. They are not said actually to rest upon it, and the word "chariot" is not used as it is in 1 Chron. xxviii. 18. They would seem rather to have hovered over the wheels, moving simultaneously and in full accord with them. The "wheels" obviously represent the forces and laws that sustain the manifold forms of life represented by the "living creatures" and the "Spirit." In each case the number four is, as elsewhere, the symbol of completeness. **A wheel in the midst of** (*within*, Revised Version) **a wheel**; *i.e.* with an inner and outer circumference, the space between the two forming the "ring" or felloe of ver. 18.

Ver. 17.—When they went, etc. The meaning seems to be that the relative position of the wheels and the living creatures was not altered by motion. On "they turned not," see note on ver. 9. All suggests the idea of orderly and harmonious working.

Ver. 18.—As for their rings, etc. The "rings" or "felloes" of the wheels impressed the prophet's mind with a sense of awe, partly from their size, partly from their being "full of eyes." These were obviously, as again in ch. x. 12, and in the analogues of the "stone with seven eyes" in Zech. iii. 9; iv. 10, and the "four beasts [*i.e.* 'living creatures'] full of eyes," in Rev. iv. 6, symbols of the omniscience of God working through the forces of nature and of history. These were not, as men have sometimes thought, blind forces, but were guided as by a supreme insight (comp. 2 Chron. xvi. 9).

Ver. 19.—The wheels went by them; better, with Revised Version, ***beside them;*** i.e moving in parallel lines with them. **And when the living creatures went, etc.** The truth embodied in the coincident movements of the "living creatures" and the "wheels," is the harmony of the forces and laws of nature with its outward manifestations of might. In the two directions of the movement, onward and upward — when the living creatures were lifted up—we may see (1) the operations of the two when they are within the range of man's knowledge, and, as it were, on the same plane with it; and (2) those which are as in a higher region beyond his ken.

Ver. 20.—Whithersoever the spirit was to go, etc. The secret of the coincidence of the movements of the "living creatures" and of the "wheels" was found in the fact, which the prophet's intuition grasped, that the phenomena of life and law had one and the same originating source. For "the spirit of the living creature" (singular, because the four are regarded as one complex whole), the LXX., Vulgate, and Revised Version margin, give "the spirit of life," a rendering tenable in itself, but the contextual meaning of the word is in favour of the Authorized Version and the Revised Version text.

Ver. 21.—When those went, these went. The words, strictly speaking, add nothing to the previous description; but the prophet appears to have wished to combine what he had before said separately, so as to make the picture complete, before passing on to the yet more glorious vision that next met his gaze.

Ver. 22.—**And the likeness of the firmament, etc.** The word is the same as that in Gen. i., *passim*; Ps. xix. 1; cl. 1; Dan. xii. 3. It meets us again in vers. 23, 25, 26, and in x. 1, but does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament. What met the prophet's eye was the expanse, the "body of heaven in its clearness" (Exod. xxiv. 10), the deep intense blue of an Eastern sky. **Like the colour of the terrible crystal, etc.** The Hebrew noun is not found elsewhere. Its primary meaning, like that of the Greek *κρύσταλλος*, is that of "cold," and I incline therefore to the margin of the Revised Version, "ice." Rock-crystal, seen, as it is, in small masses, and in its pure colourless transparency, hardly suggests the idea of terror; but the intense brightness of masses of ice, as shining in the morning sun, might well make that impression. Had Ezekiel seen the glories of a mountain throne of ice, as he looked up, on his way from Palestine to Chaldea, at the heights of Lebanon, or Hermon, and thought of them as the fitting symbol of the throne of God? We note, in this connection, the use of "terrible" in Job xxxvii. 22 (see note on ver. 4).

Ver. 23.—**Under the firmament, etc.** The description must be read as completing that of ver. 11. The two upper wings of the "living creatures" were not only stretched out, but they pointed to the azure canopy above them, not as sustaining it, but in the attitude of adoration. Nature, in all her life-phenomena, adores the majesty of the Eternal.

Ver. 24.—**The noise of their wings, etc.** The wings representing the soaring, ascending elements in nature, their motion answers to its aspirations, their sounds to its inarticulate groanings (Rom. viii. 26) or its chorus of praise. **The noise of great waters** may be that of the sea, or river, or torrents. Ezekiel's use of the term in ch. xxxi. 7, in connection with the cedars of Lebanon, seems in favour of the last. On the other hand, in ch. xxvii. 26; Ps. xxix. 3; cvii. 23, the term is manifestly used for the seas. The thought appears again in Rev. i. 15; xix. 6. In Ps. xxix. 3, *et al.*, the "voice of the Lord" is identified with thunder. For the voice of speech, which wrongly suggests articulate utterance, read, with the Revised Version, *a noise of tumult*.

Ver. 25.—**And there was a voice from the firmament.** Revised Version gives *above*. The prophet's silence suggests that what he heard was at first ineffable (comp. 2 Cor. xii. 4), perhaps unintelligible. All that he knew was that an awful voice, like thunder (comp. John xii. 29), came from above the expanse of azure, and that it stilled the motion of the wings, working peace, as in the midst of the endless agitations of the universe. The wings that had been stretched upward are now folded, like the others.

Ver. 26.—**The likeness of a throne.** The greatest glory was kept to the last. High above the azure expanse was the *likeness* of a throne (we note the constant recurrence of the word "likeness," nine times in this one chapter, as indicating Ezekiel's consciousness of the vision-character of what he saw). The idea of the throne of the great King first appears in 1 Kings xxii. 19, is frequent in the Psalms (Ps. ix. 4, 7; xi. 4; xlv. 6), notably in Isa. vi. 1. In the visions of St. John (Rev. i. 4, and *passim*) it is the dominant, central object throughout. **As the appearance of a sapphire stone.** The intense blue of the sapphire has made it in all ages the natural symbol of a heavenly purity. Ezekiel's vision reproduces that of Exod. xxiv. 10. It appears among the gems of the high priest's breastplate (Exod. xxviii. 18; xxxix. 11) and in the "foundations" of Rev. xxi. 19. The description of the sapphire given by Pliny ('Hist. Nat.,' xxxvii. 9), as "never transparent, and refulgent with spots of gold," suggests lapis-lazuli. As used in the Old Testament, however, the word probably means the sapphire of modern jewellery (Braun, 'De Vest. Sacerd.,' p. 630, edit. 1680). **A likeness as of the appearance of a man.** The throne, the symbol of the sovereignty of God over the "living creatures" and the "wheels," over the forces and the laws which they represented, is not empty. There was "a likeness as of the appearance" (we note again the accumulation of words intended to guard against the thought that what was seen was more than an approximate symbolism) "of a man." In that likeness there was the witness that we can only think of God by reasoning upward from all that is highest in our conceptions of human greatness and goodness, and thinking of them as free from their present limitations. Man's highest thought of God is that it is "a face like his face that receives him." He finds a humanity in the Godhead. It is noticeable that this preluding anticipation of the thought of the Incarnation, not recognized in the vision of Moses (Exod. xxiv. 10) or Isaiah (vi. 1), appears prominently in the two prophets of the exile—here and in the memorable Messianic vision of "One like unto the ['a,' Revised Version] Son of man" in Dan. vii. 13. What might have been perilously anthropomorphic in the early stages of the growth of Israel, when men tended to identify the symbol with the thing symbolized, was now made subservient to the truth which underlies even anthropomorphic thought (comp. Rev. i. 13). Irenæus ('Adv. Hær.,' iv. 20. 10), it may be noted, dwells on the fact that Ezekiel uses the words, "'hæc visio similitudinis gloriæ Domini,' ne quis putaret forte eum in his proprie vidisse Deum."

Ver. 27.—As the colour of amber. The "amber" (see note on ver. 4) represents the purity and glory of the Divine nature—the truth that "God is light" in his eternal essence. The "fire" which, here as ever, represents the wrath of God against evil, is round about within it, *i.e.* is less absolutely identified with the Divine will, of which it is yet an almost constant manifestation. It is, in the language of the older logicians, an inseparable accident rather than part of its essential nature.

Ver. 28.—As the appearance of the bow. The glorious epiphany was completed, as in Rev. iv. 3 and x. 1, by the appearance of the rainbow. The symbol of God's faithfulness, and of the hope that rested on it (Gen. ix. 13), was seen in the glory of the Divine perfection, even in the midst of the fire of the Divine wrath. Mercy and love are thought of as over-arching all the phenomena of the world and its history, attempering the chastisements which are needed for those with whom that love is dealing. The whole complex appearances of Ezekiel's descriptions, including the arch of prismatic colours, finds its nearest natural analogue, as has been before suggested (note on ver. 4), in the phenomena of the Northern Lights. **I fell upon my face.** As in ch. iii. 23; Dan. viii. 17; Rev. i. 17, the prostrate attitude of lowliest adoration, the dread and awe of one who has seen the King, the Lord of hosts, and yet survives, was a preparation for the more direct revelation to his consciousness of the Word and will of Jehovah (comp. Dante, 'Inferno,' iii. 136; v. 142).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*Visions of God.* The Book of Ezekiel opens with a glorious apocalypse. No doubt the primary object of this revelation was the spiritual education of the prophet. But all the deeper spiritual experiences of individual souls afford living lessons for their brethren. Therefore the visions are recorded and the private privileges published abroad, inviting our study at least, perhaps also our emulation.

I. THE SEER OF THE VISIONS. 1. *A priest.* (See ver. 3.) Of all men they who minister to others in spiritual things need first to have their own visions of God. A spiritually blind priest can only give dead, formal, perfunctory service. Yet it is only too possible to handle religious business officially without any true insight, without any experience of the Divine. The very familiarity with the routine of religious services may tend to harden a soul against the inner truth and reality of religion. The priest may see the temple, but never behold the glory of God. It is a great moment when he rises from formal service to spiritual experience. 2. *A prophet.* Ezekiel is now called to the high mission of prophecy. But he must first behold his own visions of God. The prophet must be a seer. No one can speak for God who has not first heard the voice of God or seen the glory of his truth. The true preparation for public preaching is private communion with God.

II. THE TIME OF THE VISIONS. In early maturity. Ezekiel was in his thirtieth year. This was the time for entering on the priestly office. It was the same age as that of Jesus when he commenced his public life. Our subject has a very special bearing on all persons who are about thirty years old. Samuel was called in childhood, Moses when eighty years of age, Ezekiel at an intermediate period. Different souls take varying times for their development. Some are like the slow oak, others like the rapidly growing sycamore. There is a special fitness in the time of Ezekiel's vision. 1. It was *after years of preparation.* All secular training and earthly experience may be enlisted in the service of God, and consecrated to his use. 2. It was *before a life of work.* The visions are seen on the very threshold of the prophet's public career. It is well indeed to meet God early in life. Then the soul is most susceptible. Joel says that young men shall see visions, while old men only dream dreams. Such visions consecrating early manhood give promise of a full day of work. It is possible to be called to the vineyard at the eleventh hour. But it is sad to have lingered in the market-place so long, and it is far better to begin in the fresh, fair morning of life.

III. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE VISIONS. 1. Ezekiel was *among the captives.* (1) He was an exile from his native land. God is not confined to holy sites. Enemies may banish from home; they cannot banish from God. (2) He was surrounded by sorrowful men—"*among* the captives." The atmosphere was depressing. Yet the light of heaven broke through it. God is not the less good and great because men are fallen and human life is too often a sad wreck. (3) He was himself a captive. Those very waters of Babylon by which others hung their harps in despair heard the first notes of the lyre of a braver soul. Trouble revealed the need of God, and invited his gracious help. If Ezekiel had not been a captive he might never have beheld his glorious visions. The visions were worth the captivity. If poets learn in sorrow what they teach in song, may not the glory of the song justify the experience of the sorrow, and so explain some of the mystery of it? 2. Ezekiel was *by the river Chebar.* He was in no city confines, but out in the open, in a quiet scene of nature. Isaiah saw his vision in the temple of Solomon (Isa. vi.). Ezekiel saw his in the more glorious temple of nature. God is on the broad earth as surely as he is in any sacred place.

IV. THE SOURCE OF THE VISIONS. 1. It was *from heaven.* Then the prophet must look up to see it. The heavens declare the glory of God, and yet many men never heed the message because earth enchains their attention. We need to know that there are transactions in heaven which deserve our notice. The physicist holds astronomy to be as true a science as geology. There is a spiritual astronomy which claims our study as much as the facts of man and earth. 2. It was *through the opening of heaven.* To many heaven is sealed. The firmament is like brass. No glory of God breaks through its awful expanse. God has to reveal himself before any man can see his glory. But revelation is not the creation of new truth. It is only rolling back the curtain, opening the gates of the unseen. The heavenly world is present, but too often it is veiled from sight, or perhaps our "eyes are holden."

V. THE NATURE OF THE VISION. It was a vision of God. The prophet is to see some rays of the Divine glory, some fringe of the robe of the Almighty. This is the highest of all visions. It is much more important that the prophet should behold the eternal glory of God than that he should foresee future earthly events. No doubt the secondary vision—the prevision of what is to happen on earth—is got through the higher vision; it is seen in the mirror of Divine truth. For us this vision of God comes in a new form. Heaven was open when Christ was manifested. In the human countenance of Jesus we may see that once rare sight of the glory of God, which is as a very vision of angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (John i. 51).

Ver. 5.—"*The likeness of a man.*" There is very much in the visions of Ezekiel that strikes us as strange, and even monstrous. With the sweep of his mighty eagle-wing he soars far above commonplace experience to awful regions of unearthly sublimity. But ever and anon in his highest flights he seems to find relief by laying hold of some trait of human nature. The Son of man appears repeatedly in Ezekiel's celestial panorama. The prophet seems to delight in hearing the still, sad music of humanity among the dread sounds of the larger universe. Those living creatures which may have been suggested to his eye of prophetic imagination by the cherubs at the Jerusalem temple, or by the winged bulls on Assyrian monuments which we now see on the great tablets in the British Museum, those prototypes of the "living creatures" of St. John's grander "revelations," were not simply viewed in their strangeness and greatness. They were linked to human experience by a common likeness. Whether we take them as symbolical of Divine attributes, or as descriptive of heavenly beings, the human features are equally significant.

I. THERE ARE HUMAN FEATURES IN HEAVEN. We think of heaven by its contrast with earth. But it also has points of resemblance. All will not be strange there. The same God who made earth, made heaven; and he who rules the one sphere also reigns in the other. In passing from earth to heaven we do but cross from one district to another district in the same Divine dominion. 1. *There is a resemblance between spirits in heavenly regions and men.* Angels may be without physical bodies, sinless, and gifted perhaps with higher faculties than any possessed by a Plato or a Milton on earth. Yet they are spirits, and we are spirits. There is a natural kinship in all spiritual life. 2. *There is a human likeness in God.* Man was made in the image of God. Then, conversely, we may say that in some degree God is like man. The child may give us some idea of the parent. The positive side of anthropomorphism is reasonable and helpful to our understanding. We cannot limit God to the human. But we may recognize human characteristics as part of the infinite nature of God. Christ is the manifestation of these characteristics. 3. *The human Christ is in heaven.* Christ ascended to heaven in his human nature, and he is there now as a brother man. Therefore it is more fully true in Christian days than before the incarnation of our Lord, that there are human elements in heaven. 4. *There are men in heaven.* Many have gone there before our time, and have founded a human colony in the celestial sphere. May not the spirits of the blessed dead have some influence on the very atmosphere of heaven, spreading through it a certain human tone?

II. THERE ARE HUMAN FEATURES IN REVELATION. Ezekiel's vision was a revelation to him. In this revelation he saw traits of humanity. 1. *Revelation comes to us through human channels.* God speaks to us through prophets, and teaches us by means of the lives of his saints. This is not merely a limitation. It helps us the better to understand Divine truth. It is a translation of the thought of heaven into the language of earth. Only let us beware of the literalism which forgets that any such translation has taken place. 2. *Revelation makes known to us the true glory of humanity.* We do not know what man may become till we see the Divine idea of man in the heavenly revelation. Ezekiel's vision of the human in heaven, like Plato's doctrine of the Divine ideas, suggests to us that there is something far above normal humanity for man to aim at. The earthly man is far below the heavenly. Let him strive after that lofty ideal. Especially is this possible now that the heavenly man has descended to earth in the Person of Christ. To follow Christ is to copy the celestial type of humanity. 3. *In all religion it is important not to lose sight of human nature.* The prophet in his vision of God is careful to observe anything that links the Divine to the human, the heavenly to the earthly; a purely celestial religion could have little influence on poor, toiling, struggling man. We have to see (1) God's sympathy with man; (2) man's living, earthly experience of God; (3) man's duty to his fellow-men.

Ver. 12.—*Straightforwardness.* Ezekiel seems to have been particularly struck with the direct movement of the four living creatures which he beheld in his vision, for he refers to this several times. "Their feet were straight" (ver. 7). Twice the prophet tells us that "they went every one straight forward" (vers. 9, 12), and on the second occasion he emphasizes his assertion by adding that "they turned not when they went"—a remark which he subsequently repeated in describing the motion of the wheels (ver. 17).

I. HEAVENLY CONDUCT IS STRAIGHTFORWARD. Here is the contrast between the heavenly, the ideal, the perfect, and the too-common course of human conduct on earth. The lanes and alleys of earth are crooked; the golden streets of the new Jerusalem are all straight. Our conduct is commonly marked by uncertainty, indecision, and variability, and sometimes by duplicity and shameful inconsistency. We walk with halting gait. We put our hand to the plough, and then look back. Like Christian on the Hill Difficulty, we turn aside from the steep path of duty to some bower of ease; or, like the same pilgrim in later life, we forsake the narrow way for Bye-path Meadow—the road to Giant Despair's castle. In order to realize the ideal of heavenly conduct certain characteristics must be formed. 1. *Truth.* We must really go the way we profess to be in. If we walk only to be seen of men, we shall take different paths according as their eyes are upon us, or as we are left to ourselves. Eye-service is always variable service. The path of the hypocrite is crooked. 2. *Singleness of aim.* Many men turn first to the right and then to the left, while they are drawn hither and thither by counter-attractions. Their thoughts are like the compasses of ships that are sailing between magnetic rocks. Let them beware of the danger of making shipwreck. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The divided life is a broken life. The single eye is the only safe vision. 3. *Perseverance.* It is easier to start straight than to keep straight. Yet it is vain to begin well and turn aside later to paths of error. Bad men sometimes do good deeds. It is the good man who lives a good life throughout, or at least in the main.

II. STRAIGHTFORWARD CONDUCT DEPENDS ON HEAVENLY CHARACTERISTICS. It is never easily attained, and it is quite unattainable without the conditions on which it depends. These must be considered. 1. *A right aim.* Each of the living creatures is said to go, as the words may be rendered literally, "in the direction of his face." If he faced an impassable barrier, a huge cliff, or a yawning chasm, straightforward progress would be impossible. If he faced a wrong way it would be undesirable. Don Quixote rides straightforward in tilting at a windmill, and only gets an ignominious fall. The youth in 'Excelsior' goes straightforward in his alpine-climbing, and is rewarded in the useless death of a fanatic. Heavenly conduct can be continuously direct, because in heaven there is no need of repentance. The first step for us on earth is to face about to the right. Conversion must precede consistency. 2. *A fixed gaze.* This is implied in the reference to the direction of the face. The look ahead precedes the movement forward. The blind man falls into the ditch. If any one walks blindfolded he is sure to move circuitously. The ploughman who would cut a straight furrow must not notice the daisies by his side or the lark overhead; he must fix his eyes on the end of his course. The Christian must run straight, by "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of the faith." 3. *Harmony of powers and energies.* The living creatures of Ezekiel's vision are strangely composite—various faces, calves' feet, birds' wings. Yet faces, feet, and wings all turn in one direction. There is no "schism in the body." The schism in our nature between flesh and spirit, and the consequent contradiction of our aims, accounts for the crooked paths we take. The internal harmony of a life at peace is necessary for a straightforward course. 4. *Spiritual direction.* The movement is "whither the spirit was to go." The higher nature must conquer, command, and direct the lower. Conscience must be supreme. Spiritual thought and feeling must be paramount. The Spirit of God must be sought and yielded to as the guide and impulse of all the life's course.

Ver. 13.—*The bright fire.* "And the fire was bright." Either the living creatures themselves seem to be transformed into fire, to be glowing with fire, or the prophet means to tell us that he saw a bright fire in the midst of them. In any case this fire is part of the heavenly vision. It is symbolical of the life of perfection.

I. CONSIDER HOW GOOD IT IS FOR THE FIRE TO BE BRIGHT. There are men in whose breasts the fire of God burns dimly. The embers smoulder in a dull mass, threatening speedy extinction. Love is chilling, faith is fainting; as for the flame of hope, that is long since dead. On the other hand, the bright fire may stand for fresh warmth of soul, a burning zeal, a passion of devotion, a glow of heavenly love. Let us note the advantages of this. 1. *Light.* The bright fire shines. Truth is obscure in the dull soul. Out of burning love springs the flame that illumines many a dark mystery. 2. *Power.* Heat is a source of energy in the human body as well as in the furnace of the steam-engine. Spiritual heat is spiritual force. Lethargy and paralysis seize the soul when it has ceased to glow with heavenly devotion. 3. *Purification.* The bright fire burns up foul refuse, which would only lie on a dull fire in a lump that gives off evil odours, while it quenches the flames that are too feeble to consume it. Evil thoughts and passions only disappear when they are burnt up in the fires of devotion. 4. *Cheering.* There is no pleasanter image than that of an English fireside. When the winter storm howls out of doors, the open fire within is a centre about which the family gladly gathers, and where domestic life spends its happiest hours. So there is a cheerful glow in the company of souls among whom the fire of God burns. Gloomy religion is a sign of cold-heartedness. But the brightest glow of earthly devotion is as a foretaste of the warmth and brightness and joy of God's heavenly home, where he is gathering his children one by one from the frosts and wilds of earth around the great fire of his own love.

II. INQUIRE HOW THE DULL FIRE MAY BE BRIGHTENED. The first inquiry must be as to whether the fire is alight at all—whether it has been extinguished, or whether it has ever been lit. No bellows or fuel will bring fire into the cold, black grate. It may be that the fire of devotion to God has never been kindled in a man's breast. For him the first need is for a spark from the heavenly altar. Fire kindles fire. Christ's glowing heat sets our dull heart beating in response. "We love him, because he first loved us." But the fire may be alight and yet it may burn but poorly. Here, however, we must beware of a mistake. The fire that crackles and blazes most has not necessarily the most strength and heat. It may be only the "flash in the pan," while quiet glowing coals will last longer and give out more power. Yet even these may fail. Let us see what is then needed. 1. *Fresh air.* The coals may have "caked." They must be stirred and broken up. One vigorous thrust with the poker may startle the dull cinders into a brisk blaze. Souls need shaking up. Crusty habits must be broken. Changes, shocks of surprise, blows of trouble, all do their work to let the air of heaven in upon the dull fire of the self-contained soul. 2. *More fuel.* A fire cannot live for ever on its own cinders. Old grey ashes will not burn again. Souls need fresh fuel—new truth, repeated stores of grace, food in Scripture and in Christ, nourishment from communion with God. 3. *A free vent.* While the chimney is foul the fire will be dull. The upward movement of the flame of devotion may be choked by the sooty accretions of earth. It must have a free course to the sky. It must also have scope for the play of its energy in life and work. Then it will leap up bright and strong.

Vers. 15—21.—*Wheels of Providence.* Whatever else the prophet may have understood by the vision of the wheels, it seems clear that some earthly things are there indicated in contrast with the heavenly cherubim. The living creatures have wings, to soar above the earth. The wheels are constructed to run along the ground. They therefore seem to represent the Divine upon earth.

I. Free movement. Each wheel has another wheel within it, seemingly set at right angles to it, so that the two are like the equator and the meridian on a globe. This construction allows of free motion in any direction. 1. *Providence is in motion.* Change is part of the order of nature and of life. There is a Divine progress moving on to a grand consummation. 2. *This motion is free.* The wheels within wheels can run in any direction. The great world does not go spinning down the *grooves* of change. Nature and human life are not cramped and limited to the set course of a railway. God works in freedom, and can turn the direction of events whithersoever he chooses.

II. Terrible intelligence. The circles of the wheels are awful to behold, for they are studded with eyes. The course of nature is not blind. Every fact is stamped with thought; every change is marked by intelligence. History also, the great course of the human world, is marked by the thought of a Divine purpose. This thought shows adaptation to circumstances. The many-eyed wheels can see well where they are going, and so avoid disaster and make straight for their goal. But such vast and universal intelligence has an element of terror about it. Man is sure to be baffled and confounded if he is mad enough to try to outwit God's providence. Even when he submits, there must be something tremendous in the conception of a universal and all-searching gaze.

III. Harmony with heaven. The wheels always accompany the living creatures. The lower course on earth corresponds to the direction of beings whose wings sweep through heavenly regions. Heaven and earth are linked together. The same principles that are displayed above are to be seen in the Divine movements here. The contrast between the two worlds is only too sadly apparent on the human side; on the Divine side it does not exist. Moreover, just in proportion as men endeavour to conform to the will of God do they make their lives to run parallel with the holy lives of heavenly beings. Thus the good man's career is a partial realization of heaven upon earth.

IV. Spiritual direction. Like the living creatures, the wheels run whithersoever the Spirit is to go. 1. *God's Spirit is on the earth.* Heaven is his throne, but earth is his footstool. Nature and providence are inspired. The thought and purpose and harmony of the whole are above and beyond the blind concourse of dead matter, the wild, chaotic rush of uncontrolled waves of circumstance. The signs of mind in the world are not like the wave-marks found on rocks, which bear testimony to the past existence of an ocean, but only in distant geologic ages. They show a present living Spirit. 2. *The recognition of the presence of God's Spirit will make earth agree with heaven.* The wheels do not follow the living creatures. Both are directed by the same Spirit. It is a vain fancy that men can imitate the angels of heaven. But it is a possible thing to follow the leadings of God's Spirit. In doing so earthly life is surely assimilated to the life of heaven.

Ver. 28.—*The rainbow.* The glory of God is here compared to a rainbow. Observe some of the points of resemblance.

I. A heavenly splendour. There is beauty on earth in the flowers of the field, in the plumage of birds, in the brightness of insect life, and in innumerable objects of the great garden of nature. There is also beauty in heaven. The smile of God is heaven's sunshine; his presence is the joy of the eternal summer of that perfect clime. To see God is to behold the highest beauty. Happy the soul to which it can be said, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty." Men who shrink from Divine things as though they were dull and unattractive are as yet blind to the true nature of them. The house of God is a place of gladness for those who have learnt to worship in the beauty of holiness.

II. A HARMONY OF VARIOUS ELEMENTS. All colours are present in the rainbow, ranged in perfect order and blending where they meet without any harshness of contrast. There is rich variety in the glory of God. Each may find there his favourite hues of the perfect character. Some may select the true blue of faithfulness, others may prefer the glowing red of love. To one the golden splendour of perfection is most entrancing, to a second the imperial purple appears as the supremely important colour, to a third the green that reminds him of sweet fields of nature and earthly beauty may seem most attractive. All are present in the rich pleroma of glory. And all are in harmony. There is no clashing of Divine attributes. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. lxxxv. 10).

III. A CONTRAST WITH CLOUD AND STORM. The bow is "in the cloud. It is seen "in the day of rain." These facts give it the peculiar significance which we attach to it. All is not bright. Therefore the serene arc is the more welcome; and when it stands against an inky thunder-cloud its brightness is most apparent. There can be no rainbow on a cloudless day. The glory of God's goodness is seen in contrast with the thunders of wrath against sin. It is most visible in days of storm and terror if only men will look up for it.

IV. A PROMISE OF ETERNAL MERCY. The rainbow recalls God's primitive promise to Noah (Gen. ix. 12—17). But each rainbow is a new appearance, and therefore a fresh pledge of the old-world promise. Apart from the special application of the bow to the Flood in the covenant with Noah, it is a natural token of mercy in the midst of judgment, and thus a natural sign of God's saving grace. The glory of God is like this rainbow. He is glorious, therefore, in his mercy. Love is the chief beauty of the character of God, as indeed it is its central fact.

V. A BROAD REVELATION. All can see the rainbow. It stretches wide from hill to plain, from frowning cliff to far across the purple waves of the storm-lashed sea. The glory of God's grace is not a choice fact for a few rare souls to enjoy. It is the substance of a world-wide gospel. All are invited to behold it.

PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS. This revelation of glory like a rainbow should have its influence on life. Note some of the rightful effects. 1. *Glad trust.* For spiritual faith there is more than natural joy in echoing the language of Wordsworth—

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky."

2. *Reverence.* Ezekiel says, "When I saw it I fell upon my face." Love is not to be treated with light freedom. Such love and goodness as we see in God deserve the utmost veneration. 3. *Attention.* The prophet listened to the voice that spake out of the rainbow.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*Exile and captivity.* It is not the soil which a people till that makes that people a nation. The Jews have more than once furnished a striking illustration of this principle; for no nation has suffered more from banishment and dispersion, and no nation has more tenaciously clung to its nationality, or more effectively preserved it in circumstances the most unfavourable. It is its religion which makes a people a nation; even more than a common language, a common ancestry, and common traditions. It has ever been so conspicuously with the Jews. The record of their captivity in the East is a record of their religious experience; the literature of their captivity is the literature of their prophets, amongst whom Ezekiel occupies a place of prominence and interest. His figure, as we see him in imagination, "among the captives by the river of Chebar," is historically picturesque; but it is also suggestive of sacred and precious truth.

I. The captivity and exile of Judah and Israel must be regarded as retributive chastisement inflicted by God on account of their apostasy. Although much obscurity gathers around the earlier history of the "chosen people," one fact stands out in undisputed clearness—they were a people prone to idolatry and rebellion against Jehovah. Their own historians, men proud of their descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, men themselves profoundly attached to the one true God, record with unsparing fidelity the defections of their countrymen from the service and worship to which they were bound by every tie of gratitude and loyalty. Apostasy was not confined to any class; kings and subjects alike did wickedly in departing from God. As a nation they sinned, and as a nation they suffered. Surrounded by people more powerful than themselves—by Egypt, by Phœnicia, by Assyria—their strength lay in their pure faith and their spiritual worship. But again and again they yielded to temptation, and fell into the idolatries practised by surrounding peoples. The punishment was foretold, the warning was repeated; but all was in vain. And it was in fulfilment of prophetic threats that the inhabitants, first of Northern and then of Southern Palestine, were transported to the East, and condemned to the existence which awakened their pathetic lamentations, when, strangers in a strange land, they wept when they remembered Zion. Ezekiel, when he awoke to a consciousness of his prophetic mission, found himself amongst those who were bearing the penalty due to their follies and sins.

II. The captivity and exile of Judah and Israel were the occasion of the raising up among them of great spiritual teachers and leaders. It is obvious that, when separated from their metropolis and their temple, when denied the religious privileges to which their fathers had been accustomed, the Jews stood very especially in need of men who, by their character, their knowledge, their sympathy, and their moral authority, should rally the courage, inflame the piety, and inspire the hope of their countrymen. And it is a proof of God's wonderful care and kindness that the Hebrews in their captivity were not left without such men. A noble, heroic, and saintly band they were; and right well did they fulfil a mission of no ordinary difficulty. It is sufficient to name Ezra and Nehemiah, who were commissioned to lead bands of the exiles back to the sacred soil; and Ezekiel and Daniel, who were directed to instruct their fellow-countrymen in religious truth, to admonish and to comfort them, and to utter to the heathen nations around words of faithful warning.

III. The captivity and exile of Judah and Israel were the means of securing to the favoured nation important and memorable religious advantages and benefits. 1. There were *negative* advantages. By means of the Captivity, the chosen nation was finally and for ever delivered from the sin of idolatry. The witness of the prophets, the stern discipline of adversity, the opportunity of reflection and repentance, were not in vain. 2. There was this great *positive* advantage accruing to Israel through the exile in the East—the people were encouraged to turn to the Lord whom they had forsaken, to seek reconciliation and restoration, and to make vows of obedience and fidelity to him to whom their allegiance was justly due.—T.

Ver. 1.—"*Visions of God.*" God is; God lives; God everywhere and for ever works and manifests himself. But spirit is only apprehensible by spirit. And the created intelligence finds its noblest exercise in tracing the presence and recognizing the attributes of the Supreme. An especial revelation was accorded to the prophets; but one great end of this special revelation doubtless was that by their intermediation and ministry men generally might be encouraged to look upwards, and to behold the gracious face of their Father in heaven.

I. Man's capacity for the vision of God. This is often denied by those who seem to delight in degrading man to a mere observer of natural phenomena. But as upon earth the knowledge of our fellow-men is more precious and excellent than the knowledge of material processes and physical laws; so do we find the full scope for the highest powers of our being when we pass from his works to the Divine Worker, and from his children to the Father of the spirits of all flesh. Whether we call the faculty the higher reason, or spiritual faith, there is a faculty by which we gain knowledge of the Author of our being. The greatest men have been those who have enjoyed the clearest vision of God. Such vision is possible only to natures endowed with intelligence, with moral capacity, with a free and spiritual faculty. Such natures "look unto him, and are lightened." In his light they see light. It is the especial privilege of the pure in heart that they "see God." Only the superstitious and ignorant can suppose that he who is the Eternal, Immortal, and Invisible is apprehended by sense. He is seen by the cleansed, illumined vision of the soul.

II. MAN IS SUBJECT TO MANY HINDRANCES WHICH PREVENT HIM FROM EXPERIENCING AND ENJOYING THIS VISION. God is Reason, and the nature must be rational which is to commune with him. There are many who, gifted with powers of intellect, rise to a rational apprehension of him who is the Eternal Law and Order behind all phenomena which appeal to sense. But God is Righteousness, Holiness, and Love, and the nature must be moral, and morally susceptible and loving, which is to experience a fuller communion with him. Worldliness, the absorption in the outward show of things; sin, the repugnance to submissive contact with the pure and blessed Spirit;—these are the hindrances which prevent men from seeing God. The eyes of the blind must be opened, the scales must fall from them, before the glorious vision of perfect goodness can be enjoyed, before the spirit of man can sun itself in the light of the Divine countenance.

III. THERE WERE MORAL QUALIFICATIONS FOR A SPECIAL AND PROPHETIC VISION OF GOD. Doubtless those who were summoned to be the vehicles of Divine truth to their fellow-men were providentially selected and fitted for the office. Certain times, places, circumstances of various kinds, were chosen with this end in view. But we are more concerned with those *moral* preparations which made men meet to see "visions of God." We especially note two characteristics of all honoured with this capacity and faculty. 1. *Humility and receptivity.* God reveals himself to the lowly, while he rejects the proud. Man must empty himself of self-conceit, self-righteousness, and self-confidence, in order that he may be filled with the Divine nature. 2. *Aspiration.* The look must be heavenward; the desire and longing must be Godward. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God!"

IV. PROPHETIC AID HAS EVER BEEN USED TO ENLIGHTEN MEN, AND TO ENABLE THEM TO EXPERIENCE VISIONS OF GOD. As a matter of fact, man does thus help his fellow-man. Ezekiel brought God near to the hearts of the children of the Captivity. Readers of the inspired Scriptures have always been indebted to prophets and apostles for spiritual help; God himself has spoken through the enlightened nature of his special ministers, and his voice has thus reached multitudes who were profoundly in need of teaching, of guidance, of consolation. And this service is being rendered to-day. In the Church of Christ visions of God are daily enjoyed; and for those visions Christians are indebted to the agency, the ministry, of their fellow-men. The service is constantly rendered, and is as constantly acknowledged with gratitude and appreciation.

APPLICATION. A clearer and completer vision of God is attained by those who are brought spiritually into contact with Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, and the true Light. A fuller illumination is effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose presence has, ever since Pentecost, more abundantly enriched the Church. The children of the Captivity were indebted to Ezekiel for aid in recognizing and rejoicing in the eternal light; but we are far more under obligation to him who has come forth from God, and has gone to God, and who has assured us, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."—T.

Ver. 3.—*The Lord's word and the Lord's hand.* The prophet felt and knew that God was drawing near to him. This experience he could only express in language drawn from human relations. Spiritual realities were by him expressed in terms derived from the acts of bodily life. The "word" and the "hand" here spoken of are metaphorical, but they are strictly true; *i.e.* the just idea is, as far as may be by language and emblem, thus conveyed to our mind. If God reveal himself to man, it must be by means of the characteristics of man's spiritual nature; and such characteristics are pictured in the expressions here employed by Ezekiel. The "word" of the Lord means one thing, the "hand" another; yet the employment of both expressions is necessary in order to convey, with anything like completeness, the penetration of the prophet's nature by Divine truth, the commission of the prophet to undertake Divine service.

I. The quickening and illumination of the mind to receive the truth The word is the expression of the thought. The Divine word is the utterance of the Divine thought, and the Divine thought is truth. The expression here used implies a community of nature between man and God. God has thoughts and purposes which concern man's good; and man's highest well-being is dependent upon the introduction of these into his spiritual nature. Man has not simply to hear and understand the word; it is for him to welcome and retain and ponder it, as a precious possession and a mighty power. The word of God, no doubt, came in a special sense to the prophets; there was a directness, an absence of any intermediary, in this communication. Through the prophet the word came to the people, to whom it might and did prove a word of enlightenment, of warning, of encouragement. That this might be so, the prophet's nature needed to be yielded up to the penetrating, purifying, illumining grace of God himself.

II. The submission and obedience of the will practically to acknowledge Divine authority. The "hand of the Lord" is an expression frequently met with in the Scriptures. Nehemiah acknowledges the "good hand of God upon him." To interpret the expression, it must be remembered that the hand is the symbol of activity, of the practical nature, of direction, of control, of protecting power. Now, a man could not fulfil prophetic functions simply by hearing the word of the Lord; there was something for him to do. In truth, the relations between God and man are such that it is necessary that God should command, and that man should obey. And if this is true of men generally, it is manifestly true of those who were called to the prophetic office. They had need not simply of revelation, but of guidance, of authority exercised and conveyed. What is this but to say that they needed that the hand of the Lord should be upon them? It must be remembered that the Prophet Ezekiel discharged his ministry, both by the communication verbally of Divine messages, and by the performance of certain actions. Of these actions some were symbolical, and others were directly and obviously instructive and directive. Thus the prophet needed, not merely the word of the Lord to enter his mind, but the hand of the Lord to control and govern his conduct.

Application. True religion is twofold. It enjoins upon us (1) the reception of Divine truth, as graciously revealed in various ways to the human intelligence; and (2) the subjection to Divine authority, as exercised with wisdom and compassion by him whose omnipotent hand can both point out the path of duty and service, and can clear away every obstacle which might prevent that path being pursued.—T.

Vers. 4—25.—*The glory of the Eternal.* This marvellous vision, which has correspondences with others to be found in Scripture, must be interpreted in the light of the prophet's peculiar genius and imagination, and in the light of the canons and customs of ancient and Oriental art. To find significance in every detail would be to indulge an idle curiosity; to dismiss the figures as the product of an imagination dissociated from truth would be irrational and irreverent. It is plain that Ezekiel was possessed, and all but overwhelmed, by a conviction of the glorious attributes and universal sway of God. The imagery under which he conceived and represented the Divine presence and government is altogether different from either classical or modern art; but it would be a narrow pedantry which on this account would repudiate it as valueless or ineffective. In fact, it is opulent, varied, and impressive. Everything earthly must come short of setting forth Divine glory; yet much is communicated or suggested by this vision of the majesty of the Eternal which may aid us to apprehend God's character, and reverently to study God's kingly operations carried on throughout the universe.

I. The glory of the Eternal is seen in natural forces. It was in these, as in a setting, that the more specific forms discerned by the prophet were enshrined. The stormy wind from the north, the great cloud with its flashing fire, the amber brightness gleaming about it,—all these are manifestations of an unseen but mighty power, recognized by the spirit as Divine. This is certainly a stroke of the true artist, first to portray the material, the vehicle, and then to proceed to paint in the more defined symbolic figures. The modern doctrine of the correlation and convertibility of forces points us to the unity which is at the heart of all things, and convinces us that we are in a universe, a cosmos, which, if it is to be explained by any rational and spiritual power behind it, must be explained by a power which is undivided and single. Poets and prophets alike find scope for their imagination in connecting all the phenomena and the forces of nature with the creative Spirit conceived as revealed by their means.

II. THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL IS SEEN IN LIVING CREATURES. There is, of course, no intention to picture any actually existing animals under the imagery of the vers. 5—14. But we have a symbolic representation of *life*. Every observer is conscious that, in passing from mechanical and chemical forces to consider the manifold forms of life, he is climbing, so to speak, to a higher platform. Living beings, in all their wonderful and admirable variety of structure and of formation, are witnesses to the wisdom and the power of the Creator. Let Science tell us of the order and of the process of their appearing; the fact of their appearing, in whatever manner, is a welcome token of the Divine interest in this earth and its population. If the poet delights to trace God's splendour in "the light of setting suns," the physicist may with equal justice investigate in organic nature the handiwork of the All-wise. Life is the work of the living God, in whom all creatures "live, and move, and have their being." A lifeless planet would lack, not only the interest with which our earth must be regarded, but something of the evidence which tells us God is here, and is ever carrying out his glorious plans.

III. THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL IS SEEN IN HUMAN ATTRIBUTES. Each living one in the prophet's vision possessed a fourfold aspect or countenance; the combination being intended to enrich our conceptions of the handiwork of God, and the witness of that handiwork to him. Interpretations differ; but it is not uncommon to recognize in the ox the sacrificial, in the lion the powerful and regal, in the eagle the aspiring, elements, added to the true humanity, and combining with it to complete the representation. The four Gospels have been generally regarded as exhibiting severally these four characteristics; and accordingly the symbol of Matthew is the man, of Mark the lion, of Luke the ox, of John the eagle.

IV. THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL IS SEEN ESPECIALLY IN INTELLIGENCE. The wheels had their rings or felloes "full of eyes round about." This is symbolical of understanding, because sight is the most intellectual of the senses, the eye being the medium of the greater part of our most valuable knowledge of the world without. Conscious intelligence can only arise through participation in the Divine nature; it is the subject, not the object, of knowledge. In an especial manner, the intellect witnesses to the glory of God, for by it we have insight into the Divine reason. In the exercise of the prerogative of knowledge and judgment, in insight and intuition, we are putting forth powers which are in themselves among the most splendid and convincing testimonies to "the Father of lights."

V. THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL IS SEEN ESPECIALLY IN UTTERANCE. The prophet in his vision heard the noise of the wings of the living ones, and the voice above the firmament—appealing to the sense, not of sight, but of hearing. It is perhaps not fanciful to discern here a conscious, voluntary witness to God borne by his creation, and especially by those endowed with the human prerogative of speech, as the utterance and expression of thought and reason. The music of the spheres, the voice of the stars, "the melody of woods and winds and waters," all testify to God. The poet represents the heavenly bodies as

"For ever singing as they shine,
'The hand that made us is Divine.'"

Yet the articulate, definite, and intelligible utterances of beings endowed with intellect and with speech are necessary to enrich and to complete the chorus of adoration and praise offered by earth to heaven. The tongue, "the glory of the frame," has its place to fill, its witness to bear, in the service of the vast, illimitable temple.

VI. THE GLORY OF THE ETERNAL IS SEEN IN THE COMMUNITY AND HARMONY APPOINTED BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH. The living creatures had wings by which they soared into the sky; they reposed and ran, however, upon wheels, by which they maintained their connection with the solid ground. This remarkable combination of wings and wheels seems to point to the twofold aspect of all creation. All things have an earthly and a heavenly side. If wheels alone were provided, earth would seem cut off from heaven; if wings alone, the terrestrial element would be lacking, which would be a contradiction to obvious fact. Man has a body, and bodily needs and occupations, which link him to the earth; but he has also a spiritual nature and life which witness his relation to the ever-living God—the Spirit who seeketh such to worship him as worship in spirit and in truth. Yet his whole nature is created by God, and redeemed by Christ; and his service and sacrifice, in order to being acceptable, must be undivided and complete. Whether we regard the nature of the individual man, or regard the Church which is the body of Christ, we are constrained to acknowledge that all parts of the living nature—body, soul, and spirit—are summoned to unite in revealing to the universe the incomparable majesty and glory of God.—T.

Vers. 26—28.—*He who is upon the throne.* There is a natural tendency to clothe the spiritual in material form, and thus to bring the invisible and impalpable within the range and sphere of sense. It must not be supposed that, when the inspired writers, in this and similar passages, depict in imagery of material splendour the presence of the Almighty, they are misled by their own language, and forget that "God is a Spirit." Their aim is to represent, in such a way as shall impress the mind, the glorious attributes of the Eternal, to suggest the relations which he sustains to his creatures, and to inspire those emotions which are becoming to the subjects of Divine authority in approaching their rightful King. Thus understood, the language of this passage is fitted to help us to conceive aright of him whom no man hath seen.

I. THE ELEVATION AND SUPERIORITY OF THE DIVINE BEING. The living creatures are depicted as above the earth, but below the heavens. Above the firmament that was over their heads, the prophet in his vision saw the dim form which shadowed forth the presence of the Eternal. Position, we know, is relative, and it would be absurd to take this representation as literal. Yet how instructive and inspiring is this picture! Ezekiel took the same view of the great Author of all being as was taken by Isaiah, who saw the Lord "high and lifted up." Raise our thoughts as we may, God is still immeasurably above us. When we speak of him as "the Most High," we are striving, in such language, to set forth his infinite superiority to ourselves and to all the works of his hands.

II. THE AUTHORITY AND DOMINION OF THE DIVINE BEING. A throne speaks, not only of greatness, but of power and of right to rule. God is the King, to whose sway all creation is subject, and to whose moral authority all his creatures who are endowed with an intelligent and voluntary nature should delight to offer a glad obedience. His commands are the laws which we are bound to obey; his voice is for us the welcome voice of rightful authority. The religion of the Bible is a religion which enjoins and requires obedience and subjection. Christianity is the revelation of a kingdom which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

III. THE HUMANITY OF THE DIVINE BEING. Such language may at first hearing sound almost daring. And nothing would be further from the truth than to suggest that the Deity is subject to human frailties and infirmities, such as the heathen—both savage and cultivated—have been in the habit of attributing to their gods. But there is great significance in the language of Ezekiel, when he tells us that upon the throne of universal empire "there was the appearance of a man." We have thus brought before us the glorious truth that the human nature is akin to the Divine. We can reason to some extent from our own thoughts and feelings to those of the Infinite Spirit. The resemblance is of course partial, but it is real. And believers in the Incarnation cannot but recognize the justice and the preciousness of this representation of the prophet.

IV. THE SPLENDOUR OF THE DIVINE BEING. Ezekiel uses all the resources of nature to invest his representation of the Eternal with unapproachable splendour. He failed, where all must fail, in the attempt to portray that which cannot be portrayed. His language, glowing as it is, gives but hints and suggestions of glory which surpasses human apprehension. Yet, as he speaks of sapphire and amber, of fire and brightness, we feel that his mind was impressed with the Divine glory, and that his description is fitted to awaken our profoundest and lowliest reverence and adoration.

V. THE MERCY OF THE DIVINE BEING. No picture of the character and attributes of the Supreme would be complete which did not include mercy. Man stands pressingly in need of the Divine compassion. His weakness, his sin, his helplessness, are such, that Divine pity is his only hope. Now, the bow in the cloud is the emblem of mercy. The rain, the dense dark clouds, the floods upon the earth, represent affliction, chastisement, distress. But the sun of grace and kindness shines through the gloom; the rainbow spans the sky, and its beauty cheers the soul of the beholder, as with an assurance of compassion, as with a promise of relief. Mercy is the crowning attribute of the Supreme. God is our King and Judge; but he has not forgotten to be gracious; he is also our Father and our Saviour.—T.

Ver. 28.—*Reverence.* In order that the prophet might be prepared to discharge his prophetic ministry aright, it was necessary that, in the first place, he should experience a just conception of the greatness, holiness, and authority of the Being by whom he was commissioned. He could only then appear in a proper attitude before men when he had found what was his proper attitude before God. The fear of the King of heaven alone could preserve him from any fear of those whom he was directed to visit as an authorized ambassador. Hence there was first afforded to Ezekiel a vision of the Eternal Majesty—a vision which doubtless often recurred to his memory when he was fulfilling the duties devolving upon him as the servant and messenger of Jehovah to men, and when he encountered incredulity, neglect, scorn, or opposition.

I. MAN HAS A NATURE CAPABLE OF REVERENCE. Fear is one thing, reverence is another. Fear is awakened by the sense and apprehension of personal danger; reverence is enkindled by the sight of supreme goodness, purity, and power. It may be base to fear; it must be honourable and profitable to venerate. It is the prerogative of man to recognize, to admire, to adore supreme excellence.

II. GOD IS THE PROPER AND SUPREME OBJECT OF REVERENCE. Within limits it is right and good that we should honour and revere our fellow-men. The child may justly revere the parent, the pupil, the teacher, the subject the king. Yet there is but One who may be revered with no qualification, with no reserve. The Divine attributes are such that, the more we study them, the more we shall find in them deserving of wondering and adoring awe, and the more shall we be assured that there is in them an infinity of excellence which is unfathomable, undiscoverable.

III. IN GOD'S PRESENCE IT IS JUST THAT HUMAN REVERENCE SHOULD BE MANIFESTED AND EXPRESSED. Ezekiel says, with beautiful simplicity, "I fell upon my face." Overcome with the vision of natural and moral perfection, the prophet felt himself unfit to look up, felt that his right place was in the dust. It is meet and proper that we should manifest the emotions which we justly feel. With reverence and godly fear should human spirits, conscious alike of dependence and of ill desert, draw near to the Infinite Holiness and Strength. Familiarity in devotion is hateful and contemptible; lowly veneration is both becoming and acceptable.

IV. REVERENCE IS THE ATTITUDE IN WHICH MAN IS JUSTIFIED IN EXPECTING BLESSING FROM GOD. 1. It is good for us profoundly to feel our inferiority, our dependence, our innumerable necessities. 2. It is good for us to receive the revelation of God that is only made to the lowly and submissive. 3. It is good that reverent, prophetic spirits should be the channel by which men may submissively receive authoritative representations of Divine glory and Divine grace.—T.

Vers. 1—3.—*Introduction respecting the person and mission of the prophet.* I. HIS PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS. A real, though sometimes undiscoverable, fitness between the instrument and the task, is an invariable law in the procedure of God. 1. Mark the significance of his name, "God becomes strength." Most probably the name had originated with God, who had, either secretly or openly, influenced his father Buzi in selecting it. A name, when God-given, is a revelation of what is unique and special in the man's nature. Thus Israel, Nabal, Peter, Jesus. 2. He was designated from his birth, and by his birth, to special service for God. Every man's entrance into life is designed to be an entrance upon Divine service. The world a capacious temple, and God its central Object. In Ezekiel's case there was no diversion of purpose; no casting about for a definite vocation in life. His education, all through the stages of youth, was concentrated on this single object—to be Jehovah's priest. The noblest types of the Levitical priesthood would be set before him as his model. 3. He had reached the maturity of his powers. By a merciful ordinance of God, in accommodation to human weakness, God had prohibited the priests from entering upon full service until they had attained the ripe age of thirty. Then strength would be developed; practical wisdom and knowledge of human affairs would be acquired; self-mastery might be attained. Acting on this declaration of the Divine will, John the Baptist (like Ezekiel, priest and prophet in one), and our Lord himself, began not their public ministry until they had reached their thirtieth year. There are nowhere signs of haste or impatience in the development of Jehovah's plans. Premature action is a concomitant of weakness—an omen of failure. 4. His moral fitness. Many of the priests in the temple were mere functionaries—professional automatons. The performance of the most sacred duties degenerated into mere mechanism. Men saw not the spiritual import of sacrifice, nor the awful significance of the temple ritual, and priests too often became "blind leaders of the blind." But Ezekiel was alive to the moral greatness of his office. To *him* had been revealed the nearness and the holiness of God; the spirituality of the Law, which carried its sanctions into man's interior nature; the dark facts of human sin; the need of atonement and of cleansing. Hence, as the ordained servant of a holy God, Ezekiel had cultivated humility, habits of devotion, a principle of childlike faith, candid truthfulness, conscientious fidelity, and unflinching courage. For such sublime service, the highest qualities of soul were demanded. 5. His fertile imagination. Many of the visions described in his prophetic book are based upon objects and scenes in the temple at Jerusalem. Commencing *here* (prior to the Captivity) to exercise his faith in the unseen; commencing *here* the practice of looking beneath the surface of material things, and acquiring a habit of spiritual penetration, he gradually learnt to discover in nature symbols of celestial truths, and to see God everywhere. Thus he trained his imagination for useful and distinguished service.

II. HIS FIELD OF SERVICE. 1. The vicissitudes of earthly affairs. While Ezekiel looked forward to the fulfilment of his peaceful vocation in Jerusalem, lo! war and defeat resulted in exile and bondage. With the dust of humiliation upon their heads, the chosen people were conducted to Chaldea, and residence was allotted to them on the banks of the Chebar. Nothing is more fluctuating than earthly fortune. Jerusalem to-day, Chaldea to-morrow. 2. No outward circumstance is fatal to our real welfare nor a barrier to benevolent activity. *Now* it was to be seen that piety can flourish amid a dearth of external privileges. The seeds of religious truth shall be carried into new fields. The special capacity of Ezekiel shall find more fitting scope for its exercise than amid the quiet grandeur of Solomon's temple. He is a priest in an ampler temple—a priest for the world. The *soul* is superior to all imprisonment. 3. The permanency of spiritual work. The kingcraft of Nebuchadnezzar, the overthrow of Zedekiah, the honours and decorations of Chaldean captains,—these things have long since ceased to exert any influence upon the life of the human race; but Ezekiel is still (and has been for twenty centuries) a teacher of men: his work still proceeds; his name is encircled with honour. Already king and captive have exchanged places. The first is last; the last, first.

III. HIS INVESTITURE WITH THE PROPHET'S OFFICE. Jeremiah during Ezekiel's time, and John afterwards, were, like him, priests and prophets too. In the case of other prophets, some special visit from God—some suitable display of his glory—attended their special designation to office. We have parallel instances in Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah. The vision was supersensuous, and must be accounted for, partly by external, and partly by internal, causes. 1. *External.* "The heavens were opened." The veil of material limitation was, for the time, withdrawn. The celestial realm was disclosed. A similar privilege was accorded to Elisha's servant, in answer to his master's prayer: "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." To open the heavens to human view is to unveil, in part, the spiritual universe. So, to our Lord on the banks of Jordan, "the heavens were opened." A Divine voice proceeded; the Holy Ghost was imparted. Ezekiel, like Moses and Isaiah, "saw visions of God." The heavens were opened for the very purpose that the central Object might be seen. To see God; to have undoubted assurance of his presence, purity, and aid—*this*, every true prophet requires. "The word of God came expressly," or rather *verily*, "to him." The ear confirmed the vision of the eye. Not only a spectacle, but an articulate voice. So Hamlet sought to assure himself of the reality of the spectre, when he demanded that it should speak. The ear is a more trustworthy witness than the eye. "Faith comes by hearing." 2. There was, on the part of Ezekiel, *internal aptitude*. Our organs of sense have become dull, gross, earthly, by reason of the decline and decay of the soul's true life. As vehicles by which the soul holds commerce with the spiritual realm, they are insufficient. Hence the spirit of a man has to be quickened by a special activity of God, so that it may, for the time being, transcend its native capabilities, its native sphere, in order to see God's administration of the universe, and in order to receive new communications of his will. This is what is usually termed a state of ecstasy. In the creation of the material universe, a *word* was sufficient; but so indocile, intractable, are the elements of human disposition and will, that the *hand* of Jehovah must be exerted. "The hand of the Lord was upon him."—D.

Ver. 4.—*Early symbols of Jehovah's presence.* The materials of the vision are supplied from the storehouse of nature. We climb along the altar-steps of material nature up to nature's God. Earthly phenomena serve (1) as veils, which scarcely hide the Divine Artificer; (2) as symbols, indicating his perfections; (3) as instruments, with which he accomplishes his will. For the vision before us, God chose to employ, not the grosser forms of inert matter, but the dynamic forces which are at work on every side—wind, light, heat.

I. The idea is brought before us of INSCRUTABLE MYSTERY. This is betokened by the whirlwind. In all revelation of his doings which God vouchsafes to man, there *must* be more or less of mystery. The finite cannot measure the Infinite. How the wind originates, what its full mission, or whither its destination, we cannot tell. This was a stormy wind—partly baneful, partly beneficent. It betokened a severe visitation of Jehovah—a temporary calamity destined to issue in permanent good. "He rideth upon the wings of the wind." As in the hotter climate of the East, a storm rapidly rises and sweeps the face of the earth; so, after repeated monitions, Jehovah suddenly visits men in judgment. "His footsteps are not known;" "He maketh his messengers winds."

II. There is the idea of PARTIAL REVELATION. This is indicated by the cloud. The cloud both tempers the heat of the sun and conceals the wonders of the starry heavens. Whenever God has revealed his glorious majesty to men, there has been the attendant circumstance of the cloud. At the Red Sea, on Mount Sinai, over the mercy-seat, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the glory of God was veiled within the drapery of a cloud. The eye of sinful man cannot sustain the overpowering brightness of the Deity. For what is at present concealed from us, no less than for what is disclosed to us, it becomes us to be sincerely thankful. "What we know not now we shall know hereafter."

III. There is the idea of PURIFYING ENERGY. This is symbolized by the fire. One of the most potent and widespread agents at work in the material universe, is fire—an impressive emblem of the purity and justice of the Most High. Nothing in nature is more destructive than fire. For the precious metals, it is the *only* agent that purifies. The flame was self-kindled, as was the flame that consumed the sacrifice on the temple altar. This vision was intended to extinguish the false hopes of the Hebrews. The design was threefold, viz. to produce (1) suitable terror and alarm; (2) genuine sorrow; and (3) internal purification. "A fire is kindled in mine anger." Wood and hay and stubble will be consumed; gold and silver will be beautified.

IV. There is the PROSPECT OF EVENTUAL PROSPERITY. "A brightness was about it." We have here a prefigurement of that "abounding grace" which is yet in reserve for the chosen remnant of Israel—a picture of the "times of refreshing" which shall in due time come "from the presence of the Lord." A prophet who announces *only* judgment is no less false than he who peals forth only the clarion-note of mercy. The brightness is set forth here as suffusing the whole vision—storm, cloud, fire. Every part of Jehovah's administration shall be covered with renown. He will graciously vindicate his ways to the satisfaction and joy of his saints. Immortal splendour will encircle the final result.—D.

Vers. 5—14.—*Unseen forms of intelligent ministry.* Man is only a part, though an integral part, of the active universe of God. Even inert matter is pervaded by dynamic forces, such as attraction heat and electricity; and every part of God's creation is executing, either intelligently or ignorantly, his supreme will. To a heathen monarch he made a startling revelation, "*I* girded thee, though thou hast not known me." These cherubic forms (seen first at the gate of Eden, and again in symbol over the mercy-seat) are representatives of all creature-life, both terrestrial and superterrestrial. Human science not the measure of God's kingdom.

I. OBSERVE THEIR NUMBER AND VARIETY. As all matter is cubical, having length, breadth, and thickness, so the number *four* is the prophetic sign for our terrestrial globe. Hence we have in the vision a four-faced form of life, with one aspect towards each quarter of the globe. There is completeness and sufficiency in all God's arrangements. The manifold varieties of creature-life are ordained to do their Master's will, in whatever quarter of the world exigency may arise. This is an intimation of help to the righteous, but of vengeance to the wicked.

II. NOTE THEIR INTELLIGENT QUALITIES. The human form is prominent in the prophetic picture, indicative of the fact that intelligence and reason are the ruling attributes. The universe is not a promiscuous assemblage of dead atoms, nor is the life of men the march of inexorable fate. Combined with the intelligence of man, is the courage of the lion, the patient endurance of the ox, and the swift speed of the eagle. The noblest service which God's creatures can render, falls immeasurably short of the requirements of God. Yet are our powers never so ennobled or enlarged as when engaged in his work. To him must our *very best* be consecrated. Far from exhausting our strength, God's service renews and refreshes the spirit. There is always a latent reserve of power. The more we do, the more we can do. Two wings are at rest, while two are in motion.

III. MARK THEIR INTENSE DEVOTION. "Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, and like the appearance of lamps . . . the fire was bright." The nature of true *servants* was given to these living creatures. They glowed with sympathetic ardour to fulfil their Monarch's will. The flame within was kindled and kept alive by an invisible hand, so that by virtue of its intense energy, it touched and beautified every part of their nature. As the ministers of Jehovah, they shared in his resplendent purity.

IV. SEE THEIR PROMPT AND GLAD OBEDIENCE. "They went every one straight forward . . . whither the spirit was to go, they went." Service was a delight. It would have been a restraint upon the impulses and energies of their nature—a very pain—if no service had been allotted them. Hastening to execute the high behests of God, they go and return like a lightning-flash. Personality was retained in its full integrity, but self was repressed; they moved spontaneously under the Divine impetus. Self-will sweetly coalesced and identified itself with the will of God. The perfection of a child-spirit is reached when we can say, "I do always the things that please him." No by-ends, nor sinister advantages, are sought by these dutiful servants. Each one moves in a straightforward line. The shortest course is pursued to reach the Divine end.

V. THERE WAS UNITY OF ACTION, COMBINED WITH DIVERSITY. Each form of creature-life had its special mission to fulfil; yet each worked in harmony with the other for a common end. In appearance they were conjoined, and yet were separate. The particular service to be performed by the eagle's wing could not be executed by the foot of the ox, nor by the hand of the man. There is scope in God's service for every quality and attribute of soul.

VI. NOTE THEIR SPECIAL COMMISSION. These ideal forms of creature-life *were commissioned to chastise the rebellious nations.* They appear on this occasion as the executors of Divine vengeance. "Fire went up and down among the living creatures, and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning." When God comes forth to judge the earth, he is accustomed to employ a *variety* of agents. Sometimes he employs the material elements, as at Pompeii and Moscow. Sometimes he employs men—even "men of the world, which are his hand." Sometimes he employs the principalities and powers of heaven. "The angels are the reapers;" "They shall bind the tares in bundles to burn them." John heard a voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." The Jews in their exile, when Ezekiel appeared upon the scene, were flattering themselves with the prospect of a speedy restoration to liberty and to home; but the mission of Ezekiel was designed to dissipate this false hope. A long night of chastisement was to precede the dawn of mercy. The glowing fire and the lightning-flame were impressive portents of impending judgment. "Our God is a consuming fire."—D.

Vers. 15—21.—*Nature's material forces are the active servants of the Church.* New phenomena now appear to the prophet's ecstatic vision. Wheels of vast and appalling magnitude are seen, and seen in combination with the cherubim. Now, wheels are essential parts of man's mechanical contrivances; therefore we are compelled to regard the material earth and the encircling atmosphere as the scene of this activity. In a striking and instructive manner we perceive God working in and through material nature. We learn in this passage—

I. THAT THIS TERRESTRIAL GLOBE IS THE STAGE ON WHICH GOD IS WORKING OUT HIS REDEMPTIVE ENTERPRISE. Other ends, which are plainly sought in nature, are evidently not final; they are steps to a loftier end. It is possible that, in other planets, other aspects of God's glorious nature are in course of being unveiled; other purposes are unfolding; other principles (perhaps not comprehensible by men) are being developed. Our earth is consecrated and set apart for this high end, viz. that it may be the theatre for the display of moral redemption.

II. THAT ALL THE WHEELS OF NATURE MOVE TOWARDS THE EXECUTION OF THIS PLAN. By the wheels of nature are symbolized all mechanical and chemical forces. These are ever moving in their appropriate activities; are, in their sphere, resistless. For the most part these activities are a blessing to men; but if withstood, they injure and destroy. These great dynamic forces do not act in a capricious and haphazard manner. They follow implicitly the mandates of law; they are represented as "full of eyes;" they are the docile, ready servants of the cherubim: "the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels also." The same Divine Spirit which dwells in angels and in men, possesses and potentiates (though in inferior measure) the forces of nature. Mechanical forces yield to chemical; chemical forces yield to vital; vital forces yield to intelligent; intelligent forces yield to spiritual. A graduated scale of subordination appears, and in *all* there is the manifestation of one controlling Spirit. This complete subordination of nature to the central purpose of redemption, is seen in the miracles wrought by Jesus Christ. The intervening agents are not within the range of human vision; yet, to a spiritual eye, they might have been (in part *at least*) discerned. For to Nathanael Jesus Christ affirmed, with special emphasis, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

III. THAT, BY THE FORCES OF MATERIAL NATURE, GOD'S WILL IS SWIFTLY AND NOISELESSLY DONE. The idea conveyed to the mind by the vision of these mysterious wheels is *easy and rapid motion.* Celerity is made prominent by the fact that they went straight to their destination: "They turned not when they went." It was enough that the volition of the Divine mind was expressed. "He spake: and lo! it was done;" "Whither the spirit was to go, *they* went;" "The spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." If the cherubim were lifted up from the earth, these wheels were lifted up; or when the cherubim stood, the wheels stood. Service in any direction—rest or motion—the wheels instantly and spontaneously followed the Divine behest. Here saints may find strong consolation: "God's will is our sanctification." His will shall be done. For who can finally resist it?

IV. THE VAST SCALE OF GOD'S PLANS AND AGENCIES APPALS OUR FINITE MINDS. "The felloes of these wheels were so high," says the prophet, "that they were dreadful." It is the ambition of the human mind to measure and grasp the universe; and when, at length, we begin to discover the magnitude and the minuteness of God's works, we fall prostrate under a sense of our impotence. "It is higher than heaven; what can we know? It is deeper than Hades; what can" our feeble intellect do? It should temper our self-confidence, and induce in us profound modesty, to remember that we do not, while in the flesh, see objects *as they absolutely exist*; we see only the *likeness* and *appearance* of realities. A subjective element mingles with the objective, in our consciousness. "Now we know *in part.*" We anticipate the time when imperfect knowledge shall give place to perfect certainty

V. THAT ALL THE ACTIVITIES OF NATURE AND OF PROVIDENCE ARE TINGED WITH A MORAL PURPOSE. There is surely something to be gathered from the fact that the prophet makes mention of these several colours. The fire which enfolded upon itself was of the colour of amber. The throne on which the Eternal sat was in appearance like a sapphire stone. The living creatures were like burning coals of fire. The wheels were like the colour of the beryl—*i.e.* a bluish green. These colours are constituent elements of the perfect white, and imply that God's righteousness (as well as his wisdom and goodness) is manifest in all his works. The universe is imbued with a moral purpose. "Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven;" "The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills by righteousness."—D.

Vers. 22—28.—*The vision of God is the source of prophetic inspiration.* We cannot fail to observe in Scripture that the prominent prophets were prepared for their responsible work by an ecstatic sight of Deity. Without a clear and overpowering sense of the greatness of God, along with the undeserved honour of being his messenger, mortal men shrink from the perilous task of reproving and warning their fellows. This was the royal university in which the prophets received their high commission; and every evangelic prophet, too, must hear his message from Jehovah's lips before he can speak with authority to the people. In the words of St. Paul, modern preachers should be able to say, "I have received of the Lord *that* which also I delivered unto you." We learn—

I. THAT GOD'S ELEVATION ABOVE HIS CREATURES IS A MORAL ATTITUDE RATHER THAN MATERIAL DISTANCE. His eminence measured by intrinsic excellence, not by intervening space. That both angels and men—all the principalities and powers—are symbolized in the "living creatures" (or cherubim) is evident from the fact that immediately above the wings of these ideal beings stretched the floor of heaven—a crystal firmament, awe-inspiring in its splendour—and on *this* was erected the sapphire throne of Deity. Between the blue transparent floor of the heavenly palace and the wings of the cherubim no distance intervened. "He is not far from every one of us; in him we live." We may see, not only the rod, but also the hand that has appointed it. "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved;" "The Lord of hosts is with us;" "Thou encompassest my path;" "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

II. THAT GOD IS ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THIS UNIVERSE. He was seen by Ezekiel, as also by Isaiah, occupying a *throne*. This implies that he has not given himself up to majestic and well-earned repose. The crystal firmament and the sapphire throne bespeak the presence of serene and perfect peace. Yet there is no indolence in heaven. Perfect life means constant activity. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work;" "They serve him day and night in his temple." It is an exploded fallacy of the sceptics that God has withdrawn himself from the scenes of earth, and takes no interest in human affairs. The very opposite is the truth. He acts *mediately* in the most minute changes and events. "His throne is prepared in the heavens: his kingdom ruleth over all."

III. THAT THE MOST HIGH GOD DEIGNS TO REVEAL HIMSELF IN HUMAN FORM. This is an unquestionable honour put upon human nature. We have in these visions of Ezekiel mysterious forms of cherubic life, but God does not disclose himself to the view of the prophet in any of these forms. "Verily he took not on him the nature of angels." It is nowhere said that God created the angels in his own image. It is said that man was formed after the likeness of himself. It is nowhere said that recovery was provided for fallen angels; for *man* it is provided, and at prodigious expense. Angels are uniformly styled "servants;" the redeemed from humanity are designated "sons." In the apocalpytic visions of St. John, the angels stand in an outer circle round about the throne; while the elders—representatives of the Church—sit on thrones nearer to the Deity. God has put stupendous honour on human nature. There is a Man upon the highest throne. God has stooped to our poor level, that he might raise us up to *his*. "We are to be partakers of the Divine nature." In this vision granted to Ezekiel we have a forecast of the Incarnation—an anticipation of Bethlehem.

IV. That God's nature glows with fiery indignation against sin. The glorious Being who occupied the throne, presented in one respect a twofold appearance. From the loins—as a dividing line—upwards he appeared as *chasmal*, *electron*—as when gold and silver are fused in the flame. From the loins downward there was the appearance of fire. No other interpretation can be put upon this, but that the God of heaven was about to proceed on an errand of judgment. It was still *in his heart* to forgive, if only men would abandon the abominable thing; but the lower parts of his person—his legs and feet—burned with fierce resolve to vindicate his outraged honour. Similar is the declaration of the Apostle Paul, that "the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of his Son;" "He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire;" "Our God is a consuming Fire."

V. That in the midst of judgment God is mindful of his covenanted mercy. "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about." The execution of righteous retribution upon the ungodly will be an occasion of advantage, and blessing to the redeemed. The blacker the storm-cloud, the more clear and beauteous is the rainbow traced upon its departing form, when the Sun of Righteousness again shines forth. This is God's repeated proclamation of mercy—the renewal of his gracious covenant. This brightness was round about Jehovah's head—a halo of glory, a diadem of transcendent beauty—redemption's matchless crown. In it are blended all the attributes of Divine perfection, from the scarlet hue of righteousness to the soft blue of perfect peace. "He will be ever mindful of his covenant;" and it increases our strong consolation to be ever mindful of it also. On the rain-drops this heavenly bow of beauty is sketched, as if to suggest that on the daily gifts which flow from the Divine hand we may discern the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure."

VI. That the supreme Lord of heaven and earth stoops to hold intercourse with men. This series of magnificent visions was intended to prepare the mind of the prophet to receive new disclosures of truth, new commissions of duty. The splendour of the scene, when once the prophet's visual organ was enlarged—the glorious sovereignty of Jehovah especially—so impressed and awed the prophet's mind, that he fell upon his face. Nothing so humbles the proud heart of man as the sight of God, or even a general sense of his nearness. In the presence of God's greatness, he perceived by contrast his own littleness; in the presence of God's purity, he saw his own vileness; under a sense of God's absolute rule, he was constrained to render glad and prompt obedience. Such lowliness of spirit is a prerequisite for the Master's service. "The *meek* will he teach his way." Because the lawgiver of Israel was the meekest of men, God "made known his ways unto Moses." So is it still. "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." Humility of mind is the only attitude in which we can wait with patience at wisdom's gate, and really pray, "Speak, Lord; for thy servants hear." And still God speaks to humble men. Prayer is not a mere traditional *custom* of piety. It is a real application poured into the attentive ear of God, and gracious messages of love come to us in return. Said our Lord in his last days on earth, "If a man love me, he will keep my commandments, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Ezekiel—a man of like passions with ourselves—records, "I heard the voice of *One* that spake."—D.

Vers. 1—3.—*The Divine summons to the prophetic mission.* "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year," etc. Our text authorizes the following observations. The Divine summons to the prophetic mission—

I. Was addressed to Ezekiel at a time which he very minutely records. "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month. . . . In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity." This statement made with so much detail suggests: 1. *That Ezekiel received this summons in vigorous manhood.* We take "in the thirtieth year" as referring to the age of the prophet. The mighty call reached him when he had passed beyond the inexperience and immaturity of youth, and before the approach of the decay of either his physical or mental powers. Thirty years was the age at which the Levites in the wilderness entered upon their laborious duties (Numb. iv. 3). Jerome says that the priests entered upon their office at the same age; but the statement is very questionable. John the Baptist began his ministry on the completion of his thirtieth year. And "the Light of the world" was not publicly manifested until our Lord had attained the same age. 2. *That he desired to place the reality of his predictions beyond question.* Some of these are very remarkable. "We should deem it impossible for any one," says Fairbairn, "in a spirit of candour and sincerity, to peruse the wonderful and discriminating predictions contained in his writings respecting either the Jews themselves (those, for example, in ch. v., vi., xi., xvii., xxi.), or the neighbouring nations, more particularly those of Tyre and Egypt—predictions which foretold in regard to the subjects of them very different and varying fortunes, and such as necessarily required ages for their accomplishment—we should deem it impossible for any one in a proper spirit to examine these, and compare them with the fulfilment, without being persuaded that they afford indubitable evidence of a supernatural insight into the far-distant future." And the minuteness of the statement of time in the text, and the chronological order which is observed and stated in the prophecies, would emphasize the genuineness of these predictions and the certainty of their Divine origin. 3. *That the summons made a deep impression upon the soul of the prophet.* The careful particularity of the record indicates that Ezekiel felt profoundly the importance of that which he records. Those seasons in which God approaches most near to the soul, and communicates most directly with us, are momentous; they constitute epochs in our spiritual history.

II. WAS ADDRESSED TO HIM IN SIGNIFICANT CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. *In a heathen land.* "In the land of the Chaldeans," whither he had been carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar. The Chaldeans were idolaters. The Jewish rabbins assert that the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets only in the Holy Land. But here in Chaldea the inspiration of God quickens the soul of Ezekiel, heaven is opened unto him, visions of God are unfolded unto him, and the voice of God speaks to him. In the same land the Divine inspiration came to Daniel. And it was not at Jerusalem, but in Patmos, that St. John beheld his marvellous and glorious visions, and heard the mighty and awful voices of the great apocalypse. God is not limited to any place whatsoever. His Spirit can work as freely and effectively in one place as in another. 2. *In a captive condition.* "As I was among the captives," or, "in the midst of the captivity." With others of his fellow-countrymen Ezekiel had been taken from Judæa and settled in Chaldea. That some of the captives painfully felt their condition is clear from Ps. cxxxvii. To the patriotic and the pious there was much in their exile to cause grief. They would mourn for the fatherland with its stirring and sacred memories, and for the temple and its precious privileges, from which they had been removed. These sorrows the godly had to suffer in common with the wicked. Those who were faithful to the Lord their God had to bear the captivity which had come upon the people by reason of the general unfaithfulness. Ezekiel, Daniel, and his three noble companions in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, men eminent for their religious fidelity, suffered the privations and griefs of the captivity not less, but perhaps much more, than they did whose sins caused that captivity. In every age the good are subject to the same outward afflictions and trials as the wicked. They have no exemption from the common calamities of life. In this respect "all things come alike to all," etc. (Eccles. ix. 2). 3. *By the river of Chebar.* We cannot with certainty identify this river. According to some it is "the modern *Khabour*, which rises near Nisibis, and flows into the Euphrates near *Kerkesiah*, two hundred miles north of Babylon." But Professor Rawlinson is of opinion that it "is the *Nahr Malcha*, or Royal Canal of Nebuchadnezzar—the greatest of all the cuttings in Mesopotamia." It is probable that there was quiet and solitude by this river, and these are favourable to the reception of Divine communications. It was amid the awful heights of Sinai that Moses on two occasions was alone with God forty days and forty nights (Exod. xxiv. 15—18; xxxiv.). And somewhere in the seclusion of the same mountain region "the Lord passed by" the Prophet Elijah, and the voice of God spake unto him (1 Kings xix. 8—18). And our Lord and Saviour frequently sought retirement for communion with his Father (Matt. xiv. 22, 23; Mark i. 35; Luke iv. 42; v. 16). Devout solitude and serenity are congenial with Divine manifestation and communication. Moreover, there is something very suggestive about a river. It tends to hush the tumults of the mind and to stimulate peaceful and pure thought. When the spirit of Elisha was agitated, he was incapable of exercising his prophetic office, but when the agitation was allayed by music, he was able to prophesy. "When the minstrel played the hand of the Lord came upon him." And, as has been suggested by another, the gentle murmurings and rhythmic ripplings of the waters of the river may in like manner have attuned the spirit of Ezekiel to prophetic action and utterance.

III. WAS ACCOMPANIED BY DIVINE VISIONS. "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." These words indicate: 1. *A remarkable faculty in man.* He has power to behold "visions of God." I do not attempt to determine whether he saw them with the eye of the body or of the mind. To me it seems almost certain that the vision was spiritual. But whether it was physical or spiritual does not affect the great truth that we have power to receive spiritual and Divine revelations. Doubtless the seeing faculty in the case of the prophet was purified and strengthened for beholding these sublime and celestial scenes (cf. 2 Kings vi. 17); but no new or additional faculties were given unto him. It behoves us to respect our nature, seeing that it is capable of beholding visions and hearing voices from God. 2. *Great condescension in God.* He opened the heavens, unfolded the glorious revelations, and empowered the prophet to behold them. The prophet speaks of them as "visions of God." The expression indicates that: (1) God was their Author. They proceeded from him. (2) God was their Object. It is true that "no man hath seen God at any time." The essential Deity "no man hath seen, nor can see;" yet these visions were manifestations of his majesty. Schmieder has beautifully said, "The Lord stooped to him, and his spirit was caught up to see God."

IV. WAS ACCOMPANIED BY DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest." Or, more correctly, "The word of Jehovah came in reality unto Ezekiel." The prophet not only saw Divine visions, but he also "heard the voice of One that spake" (ver. 28). The true prophet is himself taught of God. His authority with men arises from the fact that he speaks not his own thoughts, opinions, or conclusions, but the word which he has received from God; that he comes to them with an assured "Thus saith the Lord."

V. WAS ACCOMPANIED BY THE DIVINE IMPARTATION OF POWER. "And the hand of the Lord was there upon him." The power of God was acting upon the spirit of Ezekiel as an inspiring, strengthening, constraining force. "The hand of Jehovah was on Elijah," and though weary, he put forth great physical exertion (1 Kings xviii. 46). The right hand of the glorified Lord was laid upon St. John in his dread swoon, and he was revived and strengthened. Whom God summons to arduous service he strengthens for the discharge of the same. He gives power commensurate with duty.—W. J.

Vers. 4—28.—*The providential government of God.* This is acknowledged even by some of the ablest expositors to be a most difficult portion of sacred Scripture. Isaac Casaubon says that "in the whole of the Old Testament there is nothing more obscure than the beginning and the end of the Book of Ezekiel." And Calvin "acknowledges that he does not understand this vision." Yet we would humbly and reverently endeavour to set forth what appear to us to be the principal teachings of this marvellous vision. Its chief meaning the prophet himself tells us when he says that he saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah" (ver. 28). But in this case that glory is his glory in the providential government of our world. In dealing with this subject we may perhaps bring out the main teachings of our text by considering—

I. THE VARIETY OF AGENCIES EMPLOYED IN THE PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. 1. *The entire animate creation is thus employed.* Great is the diversity of opinion as to the meaning of the four living creatures, the likeness of which Ezekiel saw (vers. 4—10). We will state what we believe to be their true significance. As delineated by the prophet "it is an ideal combination," as Fairbairn says; "no such composite creature exists in the actual world." And the name by which they are called, *living ones*, "presents them to our view as exhibiting the property of life in its highest state of power and activity; as forms of creaturely existence altogether instinct with life." Hengstenberg says that the living creatures are "the ideal combination of all that lives on earth." We regard them as intended to symbolise the whole living creation of

God. And their composition, relations, and movements teach us that every variety and order of life is employed in his providential government of our world. The endeavour has been made to assign a specific meaning to each different portion of the living creatures. The symbolism unfolds itself to us thus: "The likeness of a man" indicates mental and moral powers; *e.g.* reason, conscience, affections, etc. "The hands of a man" indicate dexterity, power of skilful and active service. "The face of a lion" suggests strength (cf. Prov. xxx. 30), courage (cf. Prov. xxviii. 1), and sovereignty. "The face of an ox" leads us to think of patient, diligent, productive labour (cf. Prov. xiv. 4). And "the face of an eagle" suggests the power of soaring high above the earth (cf. Job xxxix. 27; Isa. xl. 31), the keen, searching gaze, and the far-extended vision. In the evolution of his providential government God employs powers of every kind and degree. The convincing reasoner and the eloquent speaker, the man of brilliant imagination and the man of patient investigation, the skilful inventor and the diligent handicraftsman, and men and women and little children even, having only feeble and commonplace abilities, God uses in the working out of his great designs. All creatures, from the lowest insect to the highest intelligence, are subject to his control and subservient to his purposes. It is doubtful whether the symbolism of the living creatures includes the angelic creation. But apart from this vision, we know that angels are employed by God in his providential government of our world. Illustrations of such employment abound in the sacred Scriptures. Endless in variety and countless in number are the agents which he employs. 2. *The great forces of nature are thus employed by God.* (Vers. 15—21.) The wheels symbolize the powers of nature. Their relation to the living creatures, and the relation of both to the great God, is thus pictorially set forth by Hengstenberg: "The whole was designed to represent a kind of vehicle, in which the Lord occupied the place of the charioteer, the living creature the place of the chariot, under which are the powers of nature represented by the wheels." This interpretation of the meaning of the wheels is confirmed by Ps. xviii. 10: "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind;" Ps. civ. 3, 4: "Who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind," etc.; Ps. cxlviii. 8: "Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word." All the forces of nature serve God, and are used by him in the execution of his purposes. In the case before us these powers are represented as about to be employed for judgment upon the unfaithful Jews. But they are also employed for purposes of mercy and grace. He can use them for the protection of his faithful people, as well as for the punishment of the rebellious.

II. THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OPERATION OF THE PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. 1. *The immensity of its extent.* It is said of the rings, or circumference, of the wheels that "they were so high that they were dreadful;" or, "they were both high and terrible." How vast are the designs and doings of the providence of God! That providence goes back into the immeasurable and awful past; it reaches onward into the endless future. It embraces an infinity of events, some of which are of stupendous importance. 2. *The complexity of its movements.* We read of the wheels that "their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel" (ver. 16). "The wheels are not ordinary wheels," says Hengstenberg, "but double wheels, one set into the other." Looking upon the working of an elaborate and intricate machine or engine, the uninitiated are bewildered by the movements, the relations and bearings of which they know not. Somewhat thus do we contemplate the operations of the providential government of God. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known;" "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Unfathomably deep to us are the mysteries of the Divine providence. 3. *The wisdom of its direction.* The rings of the wheels were "full of eyes round about them" (ver. 18). Eyes are the symbols of intelligence. The forces of nature are not blind or aimless in their movements, but are directed by the All-wise. And however inexplicable to us the workings of the providential government of God may be, they are guided and controlled by infinite intelligence and goodness. 4. *The harmoniousness of its operation.* "When the living creatures went, the wheels went by them," etc. (vers. 19—21). One Spirit animated the whole. The one Power which employs and controls the whole living creation also governs the inanimate forces of nature, so that all co-operate towards one great and blessed end. Though the great powers at work in our world often seem to us to be in conflict, yet in his providence God is prompting some, and restraining others, for the accomplishment of his own gracious and glorious purposes. "All things work together for good to them that love God." 5. *The progressiveness of its movements.* "They turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward" (ver. 9); "They went every one straight forward: whither the spirit was to go, they went; they turned not when they went" (ver. 12). Real and great progress is being made in our world. The former days were not better than these. The social condition of the people improves; education advances along the whole line; science makes great and rapid strides; in the apprehension of revealed truth there is marked progress; and Christian principles and practice are ever extending their empire. Under the providential government of God, the world is moving, not to the darkness of midnight, but to the splendours of noontide.

III. THE SUPREME CONTROLLER OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PROVIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD. (Vers. 22—28.) Notice: 1. *The manifestation of the God-Man.* We have spoken of the manifestation of the God-Man; but Ezekiel does not say that he saw either man or God. Very guarded are his words: "Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it" (ver. 26). He tells us that he also saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (ver. 28). It was a vision, perhaps as clear as the prophet was capable of receiving, of the Divine-Human. We can have no doubt of the Person thus indicated. It was a foreshadowing of the incarnation of the Son of God; an anticipation of God manifest in the flesh. 2. *The supremacy of the God-Man.* "Upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it." The Lord is upon the throne. He is the great Head of the providential government of God. All created life, and all nature's forces, are subject to his control. "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." This fact is rich in consolation and in inspiration to all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. 3. *The gracious fidelity of the God-Man.* "As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness that was round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord." The meaning of "the bow that is in the cloud" is determined by Gen. ix. 12—17. It indicates that in the severe judgments which were coming upon the chosen people, God would not forget the gracious covenant which he had made with their fathers. Even the judgments would be inflicted for their well-being, and after the judgments there would be a return of prosperity and of the manifest favour of God (cf. Isa. liv. 7—10). In wrath he remembers mercy. The God-Man presides over the providential government of our world in infinite fidelity and grace. He reigns to bless and to save.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let us believe in this glorious government.* "The Lord reigneth." 2. *Let us render loyal obedience to the gracious King.*—W. J.

Ver. 28 (part of)—ch. ii. 2.—*The overwhelming and the reviving in Divine revelations.* "And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of One that spake. And he said unto me, Son of man," etc. Two main lines of meditation are suggested by these verses.

I. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE GLORY OVERWHELMS EVEN THE BEST OF MEN IN THEIR PRESENT STATE. When he saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord," Ezekiel fell upon his face. We find the same thing in ch. iii. 23; xliii. 3; xliv. 4. Isaiah felt himself "undone" when he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne" (vi. 5). Daniel, after a vision of heavenly glory, was emptied of all strength (x. 8). And even St. John, the beloved disciple, who had reclined upon the bosom of the Lord, when he saw the revelation of his majesty, "fell at his feet as dead" (Rev. i. 17). 1. *The sight of such glory humbles man with the sense of his own immeasurable inferiority.* How vast is the disparity between the Creator and the creature! He, "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, and who dwelleth in the high and holy place;" we, frail men "that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, and are crushed before the moth." It is humiliating to reflect upon the infinite distance between the glory of God and our insignificance and meanness and shame. Such considerations rebuke those persons who, in hymn or prayer, address the Most High in terms of unbecoming familiarity, or even of positive irreverence. Most inadequate must be their realization of the truth that he is "glorious in holiness," and of their own unworthiness. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few."

"The more thy glories strike mine eyes,
The humbler I shall lie."

2. *The sight of such glory overwhelms man by quickening his consciousness of sin into greater activity.* Thus it was with Isaiah (vi. 5); and with St. Peter, when he was impressed with the superhuman powers of his Master, and perhaps realized that he was the Son of God (Luke v. 8). Such splendours as Ezekiel saw reveal the darkness and defilement of the hearts and lives of those who see them. The conscious presence of perfect holiness awakens or intensifies man's sense of his own sinfulness. "I have heard of thee," saith Job, "by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." 3. *Such humiliation is a condition of hearing the voice of God.* "I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of One that spake." Pride and self-sufficiency cannot hear the Divine voice. "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way. . . . The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant." The highest revelations are for the simple, spiritual, and teachable—the child-like spirits (cf. Matt. xi. 25, 26). Moses, eminent for his meekness, was admitted into communion and communication with God of special intimacy (Numb. xii. 6—8). The humbling effect of Divine visions sometimes qualifies the soul to hear Divine voices.

II. GOD IN HIS GRACE RAISES AND REVIVES HIS SERVANTS OVERWHELMED WITH THE MANIFESTATIONS OF HIS GLORY. "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet," etc. Three remarks are suggested. 1. *The design of such manifestations is not to overwhelm, but to prepare for service.* The Divine intention in the vision which Ezekiel saw was to prepare him for the discharge of the arduous duties of his prophetic mission. So also was it with Isaiah (vi.) and with St. John (Rev. i.). And if spiritual visions of the true and the holy are granted unto God's servants now, it is in order that they may more efficiently serve him amongst their fellow-men. 2. *The Divine summons to duty or service is accompanied by Divine strength to obey the same.* "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the Spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me." Here are three points. (1) The title by which Ezekiel is addressed. "Son of man." Expositors have discovered various meanings in this appellation; but it seems to us that the interpretation of Lightfoot is the true one. "This expression is of frequent use in Scripture, in the Hebrew rabbins, but more especially in the Chaldean and Syrian tongues. . . . Why Ezekiel, and no other prophet, should have been so often styled thus, has been ascribed to different reasons by different commentators. To me . . . the principal reason appears to be this—that, as his prophecy was written during the Babylonish captivity, he naturally made use of the Chaldean phrase, 'Son of man,' that is, 'O man.'" (2) The summons which was addressed to him. "Stand upon thy feet." That is the attitude of respectful attention. It also indicates readiness for service. (3) The strength which was communicated to him. "And the Spirit entered into me," etc. It is the same Spirit which was in the living creatures and in the wheels. The Spirit was given to the prophet to set him upon his feet and to empower him to hear the word of the Lord. The entrance of the Spirit into him "is a quickening of mind and body conjointly, which brings about the transition from the revelation in vision to the revelation by word" (Schröder). When God commands, he also invigorates for the fulfilment of the command. When he summons man from spiritual death, he bestows the life-giving Spirit to every one who will receive him (cf. Eph. ii. 4—6; v. 14). When he calls upon us to work out our own salvation, he encourages us to do so by the assurance that he worketh in us (Phil. ii. 12, 13). When he sends us forth to arduous service, he says, "Certainly I will be with thee" (Exod. iii. 12). And when he calls us to painful endurance, he gives us the assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. xii. 9). 3. *After the Divine summons and strength comes the Divine voice.* "I heard him that spake unto me." Humbled by the vision of glory, and revived and strengthened by the Spirit, the prophet was now in a condition to hear the voice of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13). "Signs without the Word are in vain. What fruit would there have been if the prophet had merely seen the vision, but no word of God had followed it?" (Calvin).

CONCLUSION. Here are two cheering considerations. 1. *When God casts down it is in order that he may the more effectually revive us.* (Hos. vi. 1, 2.) 2. *Whom God commissions he also qualifies.*—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER II.

Ver. 1.—Son of man, etc. It is noticeable that the phrase (*ben adam*), as addressed to a prophet, occurs only in Ezekiel, in whom we find it not less than eighty times, and in Dan. viii. 17. As used elsewhere, *e.g.* in Numb. xxiii. 19; Ps. viii. 4; Job xxv. 6; Isa. li. 12; lvi. 2, and in Ezekiel's use of it, it is probably connected with the history of Adam, as created from the ground (*adamah*) in Gen. ii. 7; iii. 19. The prophet is reminded, in the very moment of his highest inspiration, of his Adam-nature with all its infirmity and limitations. In the use of a like phrase (*bar enosh*, instead of *ben adam*) in Dan. vii. 13 we have the same truth implied. There one like unto man in all things is called to share the sovereignty of the "Ancient of Days," the Eternal One. Here the prophet, nothing in himself, is called to be the messenger of God to other sons of men. It is in many ways suggestive that our Lord should have chosen the same formula for constant use when speaking of himself (Matt. viii. 20, and *passim* in the Gospels). **Stand upon thy feet.** The attitude of adoration is changed, by the Divine command, into that of expectant service, that of awe and dread for the courage of a soldier of the Lord of hosts (compare the parallels of ch. iii. 24; xliii. 3, 5; Dan. viii. 18).

Ver. 2.—And the Spirit, etc. It scarcely admits of question (though the Hebrew has no article, and so far Luther's version, "Ich ward wieder erquickt," is tenable) that the word is used in the same sense as in ch. i. 20, 21 (comp. ch. iii. 24). The Spirit which moved the "living creatures" and the "wheels" in the mysterious symbol was now in him. Ezekiel finds in that fact the ground of his prophetic inspiration (comp. Numb. xxiv. 2; Judg. xi. 29; 1 Sam. x. 6, 10; Isa. xi. 2, *et al.*).

Ver. 3.—To a rebellious nation; literally, with Revised Version, ***nations that are rebellious.*** The Hebrew word (*góim*) is that used elsewhere for "heathen," and that may be its sense here. As in ch. xxxvii. 22, Judah and Israel may be thought of as having fallen to the level of the heathen. Part of Ezekiel's work was actually addressed to the heathen as such (ch. xxv.—xxxii.). The word may, however, be used in the plural to include both Judah and the remnant of the northern kingdom. **They and their fathers.** The words anticipate the teaching of ch. xviii. The people to whom the prophet was sent could not say that they were suffering for the sins of their fathers. They, in their own persons, had transgressed up to the very day on which the prophet received his mission. They had rebelled as their fathers had done in the days of Moses and Joshua (Numb. xiv. 9; Josh. xxii. 18).

Ver. 4.—Impudent children and stiff-hearted; literally, *hard of face* (i.e. callous to their shame) *and stiff of heart.* The LXX. gives aptly, *σκληροπρόσωποι καὶ σκληροκάρδιοι* (compare the "past feeling" of Eph. iv. 19). **Thus saith the Lord God.** In the Hebrew, *Adonai Jehovah;* which the LXX. represents by Κύριος, Κύριος, and Luther by "der Herr Herr." The two highest names of the God of Israel were used to denote the fulness of the prophet's inspiration. The same formula occurs in ch. iii. 11, 27; xiii. 8; xxii. 28, and *passim.* So also in 2 Sam. vii. 18, 19, 20, 29; and elsewhere.

Ver. 5.—Whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, etc. The latter word is used in the sense of "cease" or "desist," as in 1 Cor. ix. 6 and Eph. vi. 9. The same formula meets us in ver. 7; ch. iii. 11, 27. The prophet is warned beforehand of the (at least) probable failure of his mission, wholly or in part. We note the parallelism of thought, though not language, in 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. Such, at all times, has been the condition of the prophet's work. The expectation is grounded upon the antecedent fact of their being a "rebellious people." There is the consolation that in the end, partly through the fulfilment of his words, partly, it may be, through the witness of their own conscience, they shall know that there has been a prophet among them (comp. ch. xxxiii. 33; Jer. xxviii. 9). We note that it is the first time that Ezekiel claims that name for himself.

Ver. 6.—Though briers and thorns be with thee. The two Hebrew nouns are not found elsewhere, and have consequently puzzled translators. The LXX. gives two verbs, *παροιστρήσουσιν καὶ ἐπισυστήσονται ἐπὶ σέ*; the Vulgate, *increduli et subversores.* The words, however, are formed from roots that imply "pricking" or "burning," and the

Authorized Version rendering, followed by the Revised Version, is tenable enough. A cognate form of the first is found in ch. xxviii. 24, and there the LXX. gives σκόλοψ, and the Vulgate, *spina*. A like figurative use of "scorpions" is found in 1 Kings xii. 11 (but here the reference may be to some scorpion-like scourge) and Ecclus. xxvi. 7 (compare also our Lord's words in Luke x. 19). **Be not afraid.** Compare the like command in Jer. i. 17. The words imply, probably, a past as well as a future experience. Ezekiel had already known what it was to dwell among those whose hearts were venomous as scorpions. The comparison was a sufficiently familiar one among both Eastern and Greek writers.

Ver. 7.—Thou shalt speak my words, etc. The words conveyed (1) a ground of encouragement in the fact that the words would be given by Jehovah (comp. Jer. i. 7, 17; Matt. x. 19, 20); and (2) a warning against the intermingling of lower thoughts and a self-originated message (ch. xiii. 7; xxii. 28). **They are most rebellious**; literally, the Hebrew being a noun, *they are rebellion*, or *stubbornness, itself*.

Ver. 8.—Be not thou rebellious, etc. The words convey a warning against the prophet's natural weakness. Instinctively he shrank, as Moses had done (Exod. iii. 11; iv. 10—13) and Isaiah (vi. 5) and Jeremiah (i. 6), from his dread vocation of being a "mortal vessel of the Divine Word." In so shrinking he would identify himself with the very "rebellion" which he was sent to reprove, and would incur its punishment. **Eat that I give thee.** As in the parallel of Rev. x. 9, the words imply that what was to be given him was no message resting, as it were, on the surface of the soul. It was to enter into the prophet's innermost life, to be the food and nourishment of his soul; to be, in our familiar phrase, "inwardly digested" and incorporated with his very flesh and blood. He was to live "not by bread only" (Deut. vi. 3), but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of Jehovah.

Ver. 9.—An hand was sent (*put forth*, Revised Version) **unto me, etc.** Apparently the hand was not that of the human form seated on the throne (ch. i. 26), nor of one of the four living creatures (ch. i. 8), but one appearing mysteriously by itself, as in the history of Belshazzar's feast (Dan. v. 5). The words connect themselves with the use of the hand stretched out of a cloud as the symbols of the Divine energy both in Jewish and Christian art. The writer has in his possession a Jewish brass tablet, probably of the sixteenth century, commemorating the legend of the miraculous supply of oil at the Feast of the Dedication, in which such a hand appears as pouring oil into the seven-branched candlestick, or lamp, of the temple. **Lo, a roll of a book, etc.** The words remind us of the volume, or roll, in Ps. xl. 7; Jer. xxxvi. 2; Zech. v. 1; like those which are still used in Jewish synagogues.

Ver. 10.—It was written within and without. Commonly such rolls, whether of vellum or papyrus, were written on one side only. This, like the tables of stone (Exod. xxxii. 15), was written, as a symbol of the fulness of its message, on both sides. And as he looked at the roll thus "spread before" him, he saw that it was no evangel, no glad tidings, that he had thus to identify with his work, but one from first to last of lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Jeremiah had been known as the prophet of weeping, and was about this time (probably a little later) writing his own Lamentations (the Hebrew title of the book, however, is simply its first words) over the fall of Jerusalem. Ezekiel's work was to be of a like nature. The word meets us again (ch. xix. 1, 14; xxvi. 17; xxvii. 2, 32; xxviii. 12; xxxii. 2, 16) as the key-note of his writings. Out of such a book, though the glad tidings were to come afterwards, his own prophetic work was to be evolved.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*God speaking, and man listening.* This second chapter of the prophecies of Ezekiel introduces us to the personal call and commission of the prophet. The first chapter was engaged with preliminary and preparatory visions. Now the prepared soul receives the direct word from God.

I. God speaking. God speaks to Ezekiel: 1. *In words.* Previously the prophet's attention had been arrested by visions—glorious, awful, soul-stirring visions—visions that not only roused his feelings, but that must also have awakened in his mind many strange thoughts by their profound suggestiveness; still only visions, and therefore mysterious revelations shrouded in a measure of uncertainty. Now God proceeds from the vague vision to definite speech. It matters not whether we consider that the speech came in physical sound, in real air-waves, that any other listener, had he been present, might have understood, or whether the words were impressed on the mind of the prophet. In any case, *he* heard them, and thus he received a clear, definite, unmistakable message. We are not left to uncertain visions, nor even to the difficult hieroglyphics of nature. We have a revelation in language, a written Bible. 2. *In direct address.* God spoke immediately to Ezekiel. Here is the contrast between the prophet and the ordinary bearer of a Divine message. We receive our messages at second hand from God's inspired teachers. They held direct communications with Heaven. But may not we do something similar, not indeed in new prophecies or gospels, but at least in the illumination of soul which makes the old truth stand out in a new light, or helps us to make a fresh application of it to new circumstances? By his Spirit God does thus speak directly to every listening soul, though the words are those of familiar truth.

II. MAN LISTENING. Speech is useless without a hearer. For ages the "silent proclamation" of nature has been spread before the gaze of heedless witnesses. The difference between the seer and the man who beholds only material facts may lie in the natures of the men more than in the external facts that are presented to them. The one is a seer because he has eyes to behold what is equally present to the other, though unperceived for lack of sight to discover it. So the prophet must have "ears to hear" the message of God. And all who would receive God's message in their souls must have the hearing ear. The manner of the delivery of the Divine message to Ezekiel suggests the way in which it should be received. 1. *In a certain human simplicity.* Ezekiel is addressed as "son of man." When nearest to Heaven he must not forget his human nature. The prophet is our fellow-man. The knowledge of heavenly truth does not kill human nature, nor destroy the kinship between the enlightened and the ignorant. (1) Here all pride is rebuked. The prophet must not suppose that he is anything more than a man. (2) Human interests are to be considered. The message is given to one man for the sake of his fellows. 2. *In manly obedience.* Ezekiel is to stand up. He had fallen in fear before the vision of glory. To hear the word of revelation he must arise. God does not delight in the humiliation of his children. We are exhorted to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Heb. iv. 16). Religion does not destroy manliness. Yet God expects the attention shown by a servant to his master. Ezekiel is not to sit. He who receives a word from God is to be awake, listening, attentive, and ready to obey, like the servant who stands by his master's side.

Ver. 2.—*The entrance of the Spirit.* If it were not for another reference to the Spirit in ch. iv. 3, we might reasonably suppose that the prophet was referring to his own spirit, and indicating, in picturesque language, that he recovered from faintness, or that his "spirits" rose, that he gained courage and strength. But since this passage plainly shows that none other than the Spirit of God can be meant, it is clear that a very close connection between the Holy Spirit and man is here indicated. The possibility of misunderstanding as to what spirit is designated only emphasizes the idea of the intimate association of the human and the Divine.

I. THE SPIRIT OF GOD ENTERS MAN. We can never fathom the mystery of the nature of God. But it would seem that certain modes of the Divine Being are more within touch of us than others. So, while as our Father God rules and blesses us, and while the Son of God enters humanity generally by taking our nature upon him and becoming our Brother, the Spirit enters into individual souls, and unites himself with our very selves. The Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Something more must lie in this fact than the omnipresence of God, for God *is* everywhere, and therefore does not need to *enter* any region of creation. The spiritual entrance must therefore mean the manifestation of his presence (1) by an exercise of energy, or (2) by a revelation to consciousness. The prophet may know the latter form of Divine entrance. The former, however, is the more usual in experience. Now, it is very much to know that God does indeed dwell with the children of men. The earth is not a God-deserted waste. Religion is not a one-sided effort of man to reach after God. Spiritual life is not simply an exercise of a man's own powers. God has his share in the soul's experience, touching it in its inmost secret being. He is nearer to the spiritually minded man than that man's own thoughts.

II. THE DIVINE SPIRIT ENTERS THROUGH THE DIVINE WORD. Ezekiel tells us that "the Spirit entered into me *when he spake unto me.*" So it was in the days of the early Church. The apostles preached first; then, after their word had been received, the Holy Ghost descended upon the hearers. While it is commonly recognized that prayer is a fitting means through which to obtain a fuller presence of the Spirit of God, is it so often acknowledged that the reception of truth is an equally important condition? God's Spirit does not come like a flash of lightning, striking the unexpectant soul, nor like a gift of magic. The understanding of truth is the open door through which the inspiration of life enters. Hence the importance of teaching, preaching, reading the Bible, meditation, cultivating spiritual intelligence and enlightened faith. Yet this very connection between the Spirit and the Word is a rebuke to cold intellectualism. The Word by itself is not enough. When we have comprehended and embraced it to the full, it is still but the door through which to receive the far more important gift of the Holy Ghost.

III. THE ENTRANCE OF THE SPIRIT IS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH. Ezekiel was bidden to stand up. At first it would seem he was so overwhelmed with awe in the presence of sublime visions of heaven, that he could scarcely obey. But as the first sounds of the Word of God reach his dazed ears, the Spirit of God enters him, and at once he acquires a new energy, and is able to stand erect in manly strength. Shame for sin casts us down; inspirations of God lift us up. To see God afar off is to fall down before him in confusion and terror; to welcome God in the shrine of the heart is to enjoy a cheering encouragement and an uplifting power. The Church too often droops and languishes for lack of this inspiring presence. She should remember that God's Spirit is not only a purifying, enlightening, and comforting influence, but also the supreme Source of energy. That same Spirit which of old brooded over the face of the waters, and brought life and order out of chaos and death, now broods over the human world with infinite powers of life to bestow on all who will receive him. Then, in receiving strength from the incoming of the Spirit, the soul is able to receive more truth from God, as Ezekiel heard more Divine words when he stood up in his new strength. Thus there is no limit to the growth of knowledge and power in this twofold process.

Vers. 3, 4.—*An embassy to rebels.* The people of Israel are regarded as a vassal nation that has added rebellion to disloyalty, and has gone so far as to throw off its allegiance to its suzerain lord, and now the Supreme Sovereign sends his prophet as an ambassador to declare his will at this terrible crisis.

I. TRANSGRESSORS RIPEN INTO REBELS. They and their fathers had transgressed in the past. But the children have exceeded the wickedness of their parents by breaking out into open revolt. This may refer to the idolatry that follows neglect of the service of the true God, or to the abandonment of Jehovah after previously disobeying him. 1. *All sin tends to aggravate its own evil.* Rebellion is worse than transgression. The bad child may be more wicked than his corrupt parent—at least, if only left to the evil influences of his home. In every man, if sin is chosen, a downward course is being followed into blacker iniquity and more outrageous wickedness, till the goal is reached and the sinner has fully developed the kingdom of hell within him. 2. *Moral transgression leads to personal opposition against God.* At first the transgressor may have no desire to quarrel with God. He only wants to have his own way, and possibly regrets the misfortune that this happens to be opposed to the Divine will. For a time he tries to sever morality from devotion, and to retain his worship after he has broken up his obedience. This state of discord cannot last. The enemy of God's Law cannot but become an enemy of God. He who resists the law opposes the government. 3. *Concealed iniquity ends in confessed impiety.* The transgression may be secret; the rebellion will be open. The sudden fall of a saint that sometimes surprises and shocks the Church may be only the step from disloyalty to rebellion. 4. *The progress of sin coarsens and hardens the sinner.* The parents "transgressed." The children are "impudent" and "stiff-hearted." Reverence cannot long outlive obedience. The conscience which is roughly used loses its sensitiveness and becomes harsh and callous, like the skin of the hand that works with rough materials. Thus the worst sin is least acknowledged, and the greatest sinner most impenitent.

II. GOD DOES NOT NEGLECT HIS REBEL CHILDREN. 1. *God has not lost his claims on them.* Men may throw off their allegiance to God, but they cannot destroy his rightful authority over them. No soul can outlaw itself. To renounce a sovereign is not to escape from the power of his rule. If an English soldier declared himself a republican, he would not be exonerated from the service of the queen. God is the Judge of *all* the earth—of those who reject his Law as surely as of those who obey it. 2. *God desires to recover them.* The message may come in wrath, threatening destruction. Yet it need never have been sent at all. The ambassador might have been spared, and an avenging army despatched to the rebellious nation. But God sends warnings before judgments, preaching prophets before destroying angels, invitations to return before mandates of extermination, gospels of grace before swords of doom. The darker the message of warning is, the more assuredly is it prompted by mercy; because, if an exceedingly dreadful punishment is deserved and is even impending, it is an especial mark of God's forbearance towards the worst of sinners that he holds it back in the hope of urging to repentance those who have been treasuring up for themselves so fearful an accumulation of wrath. Much more, then, is the gospel of Christ a message of mercy, inviting sinners back into the kingdom of heaven instead of trampling them underfoot as worthless rebels.

Ver. 6.—*Dwelling among scorpions.* I. THE DISTRESS. Ezekiel lay on no bed of roses. His messages of stern denunciation raised up enemies who gave him worse than a thorny couch—a very house of scorpions to dwell in. No more hideous picture of distress can well be conceived than that of the faithful prophet thrust into a thicket of briers, which turns out to be a scorpions' nest. The thorns are bad enough, yet fierce stinging creatures are added. This is a prophet's *Inferno.* Captives who only suffered from the grief of exile would hang their harps on the willows in heart-broken despair. Ezekiel's is a far worse case—to be tormented by his fellow-captives in return for his faithful words. 1. *A great mission may bring a great distress.* The common people are spared; the prophet is tormented. Ezekiel has his scorpion-neighbours; St. Paul, exalted to the third heaven, receives his thorn in the flesh; Christ, the Holy One, is crowned with thorns, pierced with nails, and more terribly wounded with cruel hatred. 2. *A man's worst enemies may be those of his own household.* The scorpions are not pagan Babylonians, but Jews. No rancour is so bad as that of one whose milk of natural affection is turned to the venom of a brother's hatred. This is the murder-spirit of Cain the fratricide, the deviltry of Judas the traitor. 3. *A guilty conscience is a dangerous sting.* If it does not wound its owner, it is likely to turn on its accuser. Ezekiel had to accuse the Jews of sin. We may often take the very ferocity of the attack made upon the gospel as a sign that its opponents are not at ease in their own hearts. 4. *A spiteful tongue stings like a scorpion.* Ezekiel was cruelly hurt when no bodily harm was done to him. Possibly his enemies were scarcely conscious of the keenness of their words. But the rankling wound which comes from venomous speech is more painful than the fiery swelling of the worst scorpion-sting. Spiteful slanderers are more mischievous than the most repulsive insects.

II. THE DUTY. Though scorpions infest the sphere of his labours, still the faithful prophet must toil on, braving their threatening stings. The people at Banias build leafy booths on the tops of poles, for residence during the hot season, in order to escape the attacks of scorpions, which are very abundant in their neighbourhood. No such escape is permitted to the prophet of God. 1. *Unpopularity may be a sign of fidelity.* This is a shamefully forgotten doctrine in our day of easy living. Now the popular preacher is regarded as the great preacher, and the unpopular servant of God is regarded, even by his brethren, as a "failure." If so, then Ezekiel and Jeremiah were "failures," while their now-forgotten comrades, who prophesied smooth things, were great "successes." Such a doctrine would have given us no Hebrew prophets to stand in the first rank of God's heroes. But time is a great avenger. Frederick Robertson of Brighton, whose sensitive spirit was assailed by a scorpion-press during his lifetime, is now recognized as a prince of Divine teachers; while the very names of his enemies—happily for them—are forgotten. 2. *The duty of fidelity in the midst of persecution is blessed with heavenly rewards.* The rewards begin on earth in the soul's culture. Mediæval monks would roll in thorns for self-chastisement. Persecuted prophets needed to invent no such fantastic devices. The thorns were thrust upon them; their path was beset by scorpions. There is danger in the path of ease. It is better to be stung by the vicious scorpion than bitten by the deadly cobra. The thorn-bush of persecution has its venomous insects, but in the flower-beds of pleasure lies the serpent whose bite is death.

Ver. 7.—*Preaching to unwilling hearers.* There can be no more difficult or painful duty than that of a preacher to unwilling hearers. But it was seen in the case of Hebrew prophets; it was illustrated in Christ's brave dealings with the Pharisees and Sadducees; and it must necessarily fall at times to the lot of every faithful Christian minister in the present day.

I. IT IS THE DUTY OF THE PREACHER TO DELIVER A MESSAGE TO ALL KINDS OF HEARERS. He cannot select his favourite audience. He has no right to wait till men ask for his message. He is the herald sent into the camp, who must declare the will of his Master, even though his hearers are too busy with their work or amusement to give him attention, or too unsympathetic to care to hear what he says. With most things the supply is regulated by the demand. The farmer will not grow more corn than the people need for food; the manufacturer turns out the largest quantity of those products that sell most widely. But this spirit of commerce should not obtain any footing in the Christian Church. Yet, no doubt, it has invaded the Church, and the temptation is to echo popular cries from the pulpit, and to bow to the will of the pew. Many people ask for short sermons, restive under the strain of attention to more lengthy discourses. Some wish for pleasant, cheerful themes; they are particularly desirous that no demands shall be made on their thinking faculties; they would luxuriate in sweet, soothing fancies. Then the temptation is to concede what is thus demanded. That is to lower the claims of truth. In this region it is necessary to create the right hunger, and here the supply must precede and exceed the demand. The negligence of the people is no reason for the preacher's reticence.

II. THE DUTY TO PREACH TO UNWILLING HEARERS RESTS ON DIVINE OBLIGATIONS AND ON HUMAN NEEDS. 1. *Divine obligations.* The preacher is not the slave of his people, but the servant of God. If he is sent to speak for God, a burden of responsibility is laid upon him. Moreover, he is the custodian of truth. Truth seeks the daylight and the free air. Men have no right to imprison her because her presence in the busy world is sometimes unwelcome. God's truth must be brought even where it is not sought, even where it is hated and rejected. 2. *Human needs.* They who are most reluctant to hear a message from Heaven most need that message, for their very indifference or opposition is a sign of that state of alienation which God is seeking to overcome. If the family were awake when the house was on fire there would be no necessity for the watchman to call to them. But in their sleep is their great danger. Just because they are indifferent they most need to be warned.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PREACHER IS LIMITED TO THE FAITHFUL DELIVERY OF HIS MESSAGE. Mark this—the delivery must be faithful. There is a snare for the preacher in our subject. He may lay the charge of the failure of his message against his hearers, when he ought to have taken it home to himself. Though he cannot command success, it is his duty to aim at it and to labour for it with the utmost assiduity. Possibly the message has not been rightly apprehended by him nor wisely and affectionately commended to the people. He may have been indolent in preparation. He may have been cold or stern, haughty or aloof from his hearers, when he should have approached them in a loving brotherly way. Or his own heart may not have opened to receive the message. How, then, can he expect his hearers to be interested in it? One cold heart can inspire no warmth in other cold hearts. But when the preacher has done his best in the strength of God, he must leave his message. At this point the responsibility shifts to the hearers. Even the words of him who spake as never man spake sometimes fell by the wayside and on stony ground. What wonder if ours seem to fail? The apparent failure of the faithful is indeed no real failure; the *words* may fail, but the *man* has not failed, for he has done his duty—and no man can do more than that.

Ver. 8.—*Faithful among the faithless.* Ezekiel is to go among the rebellious people; but he is to be most careful not to rebel himself against the will of God. Though he stand alone, yet he must be true.

I. A SEVERE TRIAL. It is difficult to be faithful among the faithless. There is a subtle poison in the atmosphere of evil society. No doubt Christ instituted his Church in part that his followers might be lifted out of the malarious regions of sinful associations, and drawn into a more wholesome climate of saintly companionship. Ezekiel was scarcely allowed any such help from Church-fellowship. Like Nehemiah, he had to stand alone and face the current of rebellion. Then, beyond the unconscious temptation to go with the multitude to do evil, there was a very visible danger in the case of Ezekiel. He was called to testify against his brethren with such a message that they would turn against him like so many scorpions. He was to find himself in a border of thorns as the penalty of his fidelity (see ver. 6). Although this visible persecution is now rare, the spirit of it is not dead, and there are places still where the faithful must stand alone and be made to smart severely for their integrity. How often this is the case with one high-principled Christian young man in a house of business where the methods of conducting trade and amusement both assail his fidelity! It is hard to be faithful under such circumstances. Yet the duty does not cease. The rebellion of others is no excuse for us also to rebel.

II. A LOFTY DUTY. 1. *Extraordinary fidelity.* Ezekiel was not only warned not to rebel in the exact manner of his fellow-countrymen. He had a higher command laid upon him than any that was imposed upon them. They were only required to keep the general Law of God; he was commissioned to a special task of difficulty and danger in a prophet's career, and his faithfulness was to consist in his not rebelling against this great task. The most honoured servants of God are those who are set in the posts of greatest danger and required to discharge the most arduous service. Brave men leap to such service and danger in human pursuits, eagerly volunteering to join expeditions into the heart of Africa or in search for the north pole. Some, too, are as eager in God's service. These are God's heroes. 2. *Superhuman aid.* Ezekiel was a man of God, a man of faith and prayer. Hence his power to be faithful. To stand faithful we must feel the influence of God's grace. It is possible to be

"True as the needle to the pole,
Or as the dial to the sun,"

because needle and dial-shadow follow great commanding influences.

III. A SPLENDID EXAMPLE. One faithful man among a host of traitors is a mighty encouragement to the weak. He can be a nucleus about which they can cluster, although they would never have had strength to stand without his great personality. Like a lighthouse in a wild and wintry night, the solitary example of fidelity sheds its encouraging rays far out to the darkness round about. Joseph in immoral Egypt, Daniel in unprincipled Babylon, Paul at wicked Rome, Luther at Worms, Latimer at Oxford,—these men are beacon-lights shining down the ages. It is worth the cost of all the hardship of exceptional trials of fidelity to become such magnificent inspiring influences for all time.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—"*Son of man.*" This expression is so constantly used with reference to Ezekiel that it cannot be considered a mere Oriental idiom with no peculiar significance. There were special reasons why Ezekiel, as the prophet chosen to communicate God's will to Israel, should be thus designated.

I. TRUE HUMANITY IN THE PROPHET ENABLED HIM TO HOLD COMMUNION WITH THE FATHER OF SPIRITS. Man is God's chosen vehicle for communicating with man. The ministry of angels is a reality, but such ministry is subordinate to that which is strictly human. Man is made in the likeness of God, and shares in the Divine reason. His highest thinking, it was grandly said by Kepler, is thinking over again the thoughts of God. It is in virtue of this prerogative that human beings are able to enter into the counsels of the Eternal Wisdom. The inferior inhabitants of this globe may indeed express in their structure the designs of the Creator. But man is more than the creature; he is the *child* of the heavenly Father, who calls his children to share in the revelation of his own character and will. And certain selected individuals, notably those designated "prophets," are admitted into special relations with the Infinite Spirit, that they may be made the medium of carrying out his purposes of wisdom and of love.

II. THE PROPHET'S TRUE HUMANITY ENABLED HIM TO ENTER INTO THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND NEEDS OF THOSE TO WHOM HE MINISTERED. The prophets sprang from the people, and knew them from familiar intercourse and intimacy; they knew their sins and weaknesses, their temptations and struggles. Some, like Elijah and John the Baptist, led a life secluded and ascetic—only now and again coming forth from their retirement and mingling with their countrymen for some special purpose. But others lived amongst those whom they had known in childhood and youth, and made themselves acquainted with their temporal condition and their spiritual wants. It seems to have been so with Ezekiel. And as participation in common sorrows and sufferings often draws men closer together, it is reasonable to believe that comrades in exile were upon terms of closest fellowship and correspondence. The prophet knew well, in virtue of a common nature and a common lot, the people amongst whom he dwelt, and to whom he was called to minister.

III. THE PROPHET'S TRUE HUMANITY RENDERED HIS MINISTRY SYMPATHETIC, AUTHORITATIVE, AND EFFECTIVE. Men may see much of one another, may be brought frequently into contact with one another, and yet may have little mutual knowledge, and even feel little interest in one another's experiences. But this was not the case with Ezekiel, who did not harden his heart against even the disobedient, rebellious, and unresponsive, but, on the contrary, cultivated, as a man, a spirit of true brotherhood with his fellow-men. He was deeply pained when it was his duty to threaten or to denounce; he was sincerely glad when it was given him to speak words of kindness and encouragement. There was, in consequence of this human sympathy, an especial authoritativeness in his prophetic ministrations. What he said and did went home, in many cases, to the hearts of those whom he addressed; because they interpreted his words and deeds in the light of his spirit and character.

IV. THE PROPHET WAS THUS A TYPE OF CHRIST HIMSELF, WHO WAS WONT TO DESIGNATE HIMSELF THE SON OF MAN. Perfect Man as well as perfect God, the Lord Christ entered into the position of those whom he came to save. Like Ezekiel, the Lord Jesus came to a captive people; like Ezekiel, he addressed to them words of reproach, words of warning, words of consolation, words of hope. He did more than this: he bore their sins, and carried their sorrows. And thus he brought deliverance to the bondmen, opened the prison-doors, and bade the oppressed go free.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Rebellious nations.* This must have been a hard message for Ezekiel to deliver to his fellow-countrymen. It was the heathen, the Gentiles, who were usually designated "nations;" and in applying this designation to Israel, he seemed to degrade the chosen people from their peculiar position of honour, and to rank them with the idolatrous nations whom they were accustomed to despise. And it has been surmised that, in employing the plural, the prophet intended to intimate that the Hebrews no longer constituted one people, one state, but were divided among themselves, dissolved as it were into disconnected and opposing sections and factions. It may be just and profitable to regard Israel as representative of the human race, in respect to this lamentable charge of rebellion, which may certainly be brought against mankind at large.

I. REBELLION IMPLIES ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO ARE GUILTY OF IT THE POSSESSION OF A VOLUNTARY NATURE. If there is no liberty, there can be no rebellion. Rebellion implies intelligent apprehension, and it implies deliberate purpose. The rebel knows what is the authority which he defies, and he defies that authority, not only intelligently, but of purpose. Brutes do not rebel; but men and angels may do, and have done Hence the serious responsibility attaching to rebellion against God on the part of wilful though misguided men.

II. REBELLION IMPLIES A JUST AUTHORITY AGAINST WHICH, CONTRARY TO RIGHT, THE REBEL SETS HIMSELF. There can be no rebellion where there is no government, no rebel where there is no governor. Neither can there be rebellion, properly speaking, against a usurper, who has no claim upon the loyalty and allegiance of those whom he may unjustly denominate his subjects. The moral government of the world is a fact, and its administration is characterized by equity. As the universal Legislator and Judge, God demands the subjection and obedience of mankind; all are his lawful subjects. There is no rebel against Divine authority who can bring against the rule and sway of the great Governor of the universe the charge of injustice and tyranny. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

III. REBELLION AGAINST GOD INVOLVES GREAT GUILT AND MISERY. This awful fact is not to be questioned by any reasonable student of the moral history of mankind. Nowhere more strikingly than in the history of Israel has it been shown that they who resist Divine authority and violate Divine Law incur the most awful guilt and entail upon themselves the most awful punishments. Sentimentalists may complain that such assertions are the expression of severity and fanaticism; but it remains for ever true that "the way of transgressors is hard," and "the wages of sin is death."

IV. MAN'S GUILTY REBELLION PROMPTED INFINITE MERCY TO PROVIDE A VAST REDEMPTION AND DELIVERANCE. The history of the Hebrew people exhibits instances not only of human apostasy, but of Divine compassion and merciful interposition and deliverance. Thus the Captivity was itself a punishment for rebellion, for idolatry, and for all the evils idolatry brought upon the nation. Yet God did not forget to be gracious. He made the Captivity an occasion for displaying his grace; mercy triumphed over judgment. Repentance and submission took the place of resistance and defiance. Discipline, chastisement, answered its appointed purpose. God pitied the rebels even whilst he censured the rebellion. And very similar has been his treatment of mankind at large. The whole race has rebelled, and the whole race has been redeemed. There is spiritual amnesty provided through Christ Jesus, reconciliation through faith and repentance, restoration to affectionate loyalty and to happy subjection through the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit.

V. WHEN REBELLION IS SUBDUED, AND THE REBEL HUMBLED, SUBJECTION IS FOLLOWED BY LOYALTY AND HAPPINESS. God does not leave his work half done. He pardons the penitent, but he blesses the loyal and the reconciled. Great is the change which takes place in the state of him who has laid down the weapons of rebellion and has cast himself in penitence and submission before the footstool of the throne. As rebellion is exchanged for loyalty, and defiance for submission and gratitude, so disgrace is exchanged for honour, and the just sentence of death for the merciful assurance of Divine favour and eternal life.—T.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The prophet's commission.* Nothing is clearer than that the prophets did not believe themselves to be acting and speaking simply upon the promptings of their own inclinations or their own convictions of what was right and expedient. Whether they were self-deluded or not, certain it is that they deemed themselves ministers and messengers of the Eternal. It was this which gave them both courage and authority. In the most explicit manner, Ezekiel in this passage records his commission to go among his fellow-countrymen as the herald of God's wisdom, authority, and grace.

I. THE COMMISSION. "I do send thee unto them." There is great simplicity and great dignity in this language of authorization; he who heard it could never forget it. When disappointed in the result of his ministry, or alarmed at the threats of those whom he sought to benefit, these words must often have recurred to the mind of the prophet, inspiring him with fresh zeal and courage. If the ambassador of a powerful king is strengthened in the fulfilment of his trust by the recollection that he received his authority from a court honoured by friends and feared by foes, how much more must the ambassador from God derive courage and confidence from the knowledge that he is sent by the Supreme, who will never desert those who engage in his service and do his will!

II. THE MESSAGE. At first the prophet received no other message than this: "Thus saith the Lord God." But this was the earnest of much to follow. And, indeed, the whole of the prophecies were amplifications of this. Ezekiel was to go among the children of the Captivity with words from Jehovah. A prophet is one who speaks for, on behalf of, the Divine Being by whom he is commissioned. If the speaker had his own special reasons for believing that the words he uttered were not his own, but God's, those who listened to his declarations of warning and of promise had *a witness within*, in the testimony of their own conscience, assuring them that the prophet spoke with Divine authority. And this is so still with all who will listen reverently and obediently to the heavenly voice. It is thus that the Scriptures possess over our minds a preeminent power; their writers preface every authoritative utterance with the statement, "Thus saith the Lord."

III. THE VARIOUS RECEPTION OF THE MESSAGE. It is in accordance with the reasonableness of the inspired writers that they cherished such moderate expectations regarding the effect to be produced by their ministry. Fanatics would have felt assured that, in such circumstances, they must meet with ready credence and immediate obedience. Ezekiel certainly had no such delusive anticipations, and was indeed expressly warned that his message would meet with varying reception. Some would hear, some would forbear. It was with Ezekiel as in the Christian dispensation it was with Paul; we are told that the result of his ministry at Rome was that "some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved."

IV. THE IMPRESSION PRODUCED BY GOD'S MESSENGER UPON THOSE TO WHOM HE WAS SENT. "They shall know that there hath been a prophet among them." Even those who were so much under the influence of ignorance, prejudice, evil example, and sin, that they did not and would not turn unto God, nevertheless were well aware that their obstinate impiety was unjustifiable. They might ridicule the prophet in their language, but they reverenced him in their hearts. Beneath the laugh of incredulity was a deep-seated fear, springing from an inward conviction that the voice they rejected was indeed the voice of God. Had one come among them flattering their vanity and pride, and ministering to their sinful tastes, they would in their heart of hearts have despised him. But when one came fearlessly upbraiding them with their unfaithfulness, and denouncing their guilty defection, they could not but know that a prophet had been among them.

APPLICATION. This passage has an especial significance for ministers of God's Word, and for all religious teachers. It shows them where their strength lies; warns them against enunciating their own speculations or inculcating precepts founded upon their own experience; and directs them to go among their fellow-men with this dignified and effective message, "Thus saith the Lord." They may be tempted to court men's favour and good will by uttering words of flattery. But it is well that, when so tempted, they should remember that there is in men a conscience, which may be repressed, but which cannot be crushed, which renders a homage, though silent, to the just authority of truth and righteousness, and which recognizes, even though it does not lead to practical obedience, the precepts and the warnings which are from God.—T.

Ver. 8.—*Prophetic receptiveness.* This Book of Ezekiel is one abounding in figure and symbol; it would be a mistake to take all its contents literally. When we read that the prophet was required by God to *eat* that which was given him, and are then informed that a written scroll was that which was to be eaten, we are at first surprised. But then we recollect that eating has been in many religions regarded as a sacred and symbolical act. The Mosaic dispensation had its Paschal meal, and the Christian religion has its sacrament of the Lord's Supper. So that the symbol of the text is quite in accordance with the practices which, upon Divine authority, have prevailed in the Church throughout the ages.

I. IN ORDER THAT THE TEACHER MAY IMPART TO HIS FELLOW-MEN, HE MUST FIRST RECEIVE FROM GOD. That this is the meaning of the symbol of this passage is evident from the context. It was in connection with the prophet's commission that he was bidden to eat the scroll. It was thus that he was to fit and qualify himself for his special ministry; he was to take from God, that he might have wherewith to supply the needs of the people.

II. THE REVELATION OF GOD MUST BE GRADUALLY AND COMPLETELY APPROPRIATED AND ASSIMILATED BY THE MINISTER OF DIVINE TRUTH. Eating is a process by which suitable nutriment is introduced into the bodily system, and assimilated by the organs of digestion, so that it both builds up the bodily structure and supplies the organism with renewed power for life-work. Such is the function fulfilled by God's truth in connection with the spiritual being and life. The teacher of the revealed mind and will of the Supreme cannot be fitted for his service by a superficial and slight acquaintance with his message. That message must sink into the depths of his nature, must penetrate his being, must enter into all the functions of the spiritual life.

III. THE RELIGIOUS TEACHER MAY HAVE TO CONTEND WITH AND OVERCOME NATURAL DISINCLINATIONS TOWARDS SOME PARTS OF THE MINISTRY ENTRUSTED TO HIM. The requirement of God could not but awaken in the prophet's mind something of repugnance. The scroll he was bidden to eat was filled with lamentations, mourning, and woe; the message he was commissioned to deliver was a message of reproach, of expostulation, of warning, of threatening. Such a ministry could not be agreeable to his natural inclinations; he must have shrunk from it as uncongenial and distasteful. It must often happen that the fulfilment of duty is distressing to the faithful and yet sensitive preacher of righteousness; it is a bitter thing to deliver a message of condemnation to one's fellow-men.

IV. YET IT IS SWEET TO OBEY AND TO FULFIL THE COMMANDS OF THE LORD. When the disinclination to undertake the painful commission had been overcome, a profound satisfaction followed. The prophet found that in keeping God's commandments there is great reward. The distress is temporary and brief; the satisfaction is lasting. The surgeon may often inflict pain upon his patient; the physician may see it right to order a course of treatment which is repulsive. To act wisely and conscientiously may, in such cases, be painful. But let the duty be discharged, and there follows a true satisfaction. It was so with Ezekiel; it is so with every true and faithful servant of God. The office may be one arduous and difficult, painful and repugnant; yet, if it is the office to which God calls a man, obedience and fidelity, the unshrinking fulfilment of the service, will bring a rich reward. Sweet are the delights of those who conquer self, who yield themselves up to the service of that Saviour who himself carried the cross. They shall enter into the joy of the Lord.—T.

Ver. 9.—*The scroll.* It is certainly remarkable that, whilst the ministry of Ezekiel was to be fulfilled by word of mouth, the communication of its substance should be figuratively represented by the scroll—"a roll of a book, written within and without." What the scroll was to the prophet, it may fairly be said, the volume of Holy Scripture is to us. Holy Writ is the record of successive revelations, and its form, as literature, answers very important purposes. Scripture is the standard of faith and doctrine and practice, to which the ministers of the gospel are bound to refer, according to the well-known saying, "The Church to witness, the Scripture to prove." This strikingly symbolical passage suggests valuable truth regarding both the form and the substance of the inspired volume.

I. THE FORM OF THE WRITTEN REVELATION. The fact is that we have the scroll, the volume, *i.e.* the mind of the holy and inspired men of old perpetuated in the written form. Certain advantages are by this means secured, which more than compensate for any disadvantages which may possibly be connected with the literary form which revelation assumes. 1. A written revelation, as compared with one merely oral, is *deliberate.* What men say in conversation, or under the stress of popular oratory, is not to be compared in this respect with what is carefully committed to a literary form. Speech is often intended merely to produce an immediate impression; what is written is probably intended to bear examination, to stand the test of reflection and of time. 2. *Continuous.* Fragmentary and disjointed utterances are all that can be expected from an ordinary speaker; and even a thoughtful and powerful speaker must usually, by the very conditions of his work, come short in the point of orderliness and continuity. The preparation of a book, and especially of a volume containing in many books the revelation of the Divine mind, involves a design, a plan, a connection and correspondence among the several parts which go to make up the whole. 3. *Incorruptible.* The untrustworthiness of tradition is proverbial. Wisdom is apparent in the arrangement by which the communication of God's will to man has been placed beyond the corrupting influences to which every oral tradition is liable.

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE WRITTEN REVELATION. The "roll of a book" delivered to Ezekiel may be presumed to have been the emblem of the communications which were to form the matter of his prophetic ministry. And although the writing is described as consisting of mourning and woe, this is probably only because such was the prevailing tenor of the earlier portions of his prophecies. We may say generally that the written revelation through Ezekiel is a summary of that which occupies the entire Bible. The scroll, accordingly, may be considered as: 1. Displaying the Divine interest in mankind. 2. Revealing Divine acquaintance with men's sinful character, their wanderings from God, and the various errors and follies into which sin has ever led its victims. 3. Declaring God's foresight of the miserable condition into which idolatry, apostasy, and every kind of moral evil and error must certainly plunge the rebellious. Nowhere is this more vividly displayed than in this book of prophecies. 4. Expressing the Divine solicitude for man's welfare, and the Divine provision for man's recovery and salvation. In all these several particulars the Book of Ezekiel is a miniature of the Bible. The theme of the prophet, and the theme of Holy Writ as a whole, is surely nothing else than this—the exhibition of man's heinous sin, and the offer of God's merciful salvation.—T.

Vers. 1, 2.—*The interlacing of Divine command and Divine strength.* The commands of God are acts of kindness. If he had abandoned us, he would give us no indications of his will. He is not so unreasonable as to give commands without also proffering help. If he says "This is the way," he also says, "I will be with thee." Hence, with Augustine, we may say to God, "Give what thou requirest, and require what thou pleasest."

I. COMMAND. "Stand upon thy feet." The form of address, "son of man," was intended to encourage the prophet. The vision of God's kingdom, and of his royal state, had oppressed the mind of Ezekiel, and he had prostrated himself before such majestic splendour. But now the voice of the supreme Monarch assures him that he may also find a place among the honoured servants of Jehovah. Though but a frail man, a descendant of erring progenitors, he was yet *a man*, and therefore capable of high attainment and noble service. There was no hardship implied in *this* command to stand upon his feet. It chimed in with his own predisposition. Duty taken step by step, in easy gradations, becomes a delight. The requirement was honourable. There had been occasion for prostrate humility in the presence of the holy God. But humility is the way to honour. *Now* he is required to lift himself up to the full stature of his manhood, and to be ready for active and willing service. Use thy feet! Look heavenward! Be a man! Equip thyself for service!

II. PROMISE. "I will speak unto thee." This is a stupendous act of Divine condescension—to hold intercourse with fallen, fickle men. It is a mark of special favour if an earthly monarch calls a commoner into his presence, discloses to him royal counsels, and engages his services for the throne. Much greater token of good will is it, if that commoner had been heretofore a detected criminal, a dangerous rebel. But the similitude serves very poorly to illustrate the immeasurable grace of the heavenly King, who stoops to converse with the children of men. Human monarchs have set times, which they set apart to give audience to the noblest of their subjects. But God permits us to approach him at all times, and, if we will but speak to him, he will also speak unto us. "His delights are with the sons of men." He loves to employ men in his service. Yea! he has determined to employ *none but men* in proclaiming to their brethren the royal purposes of redemption.

III. INDWELLING POWER. While Jehovah spake to his servant, "the Spirit entered into him." Finding in Ezekiel a readiness to obey, God immediately imparted to him the needed strength. If the *will* be present with us, the *power* to perform will not long be absent. When humility opens the door of the human heart, God will enter and abide there. It was not so much Ezekiel who put forth his strength and rose erect, as the indwelling Spirit, "who set him on his feet." Verily, "in God we live, and move, and exist." "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Ezekiel's name was no misnomer. In very deed, God was his Strength. And the result of the Spirit's entrance, further, was "that I heard him that spake unto me." The very *power* to hear, whether by the organ of sense, or by the finer aptitude of the spirit, comes alone from God. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—D.

Vers. 2—5.—*An arduous embassage.* Every prophet is a missionary; every true missionary is a prophet. In an inferior sense of the word, he is a mediator—a mediator between God and man.

I. THE MISSIONARY CHARACTER OF THE PROPHET. He is one "sent." He goes not to this difficult and responsible work by the impulse of his own reason or will. He is in the employ and under the direction of another—of One whom he cannot disregard. He cannot go or stay, as he pleases. He is a servant. The Son of God himself has undertaken similar work. He was "sent" into our world on an errand of kindness. "As thou hast sent me, so have I sent them."

II. THE MISSIONARY'S UNPROMISING FIELD OF ACTION. "I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation." The possession of outward advantages, or of special

Divine favours, does not ensure gratitude or obedience on the part of men. In Eden, man transgressed. In Canaan, the glory of all lands, the Hebrews rebelled. Righteousness is not conveyed by blood-relationship. The piety of Abraham did not descend in the line of natural posterity. But rebellion is a weed that grows freely in the degenerate soil of the human heart. The people of Israel, in Ezekiel's time, were hardened in sin. The evil had become inveterate by long centuries of vicious habit, and all the alternate measures of kindness and severity which God had employed had failed to reduce the people to submission. Though now in exile and disgrace, yet "to that very day" the rebellious spirit continued. Nor were they even ashamed of the past. No blush tinged their cheeks. All right feeling seemed petrified within!

III. THE MISSIONARY'S INSTRUMENT. He is armed simply with the authoritative Word of God. What he hears from God, *that*, and *that alone*, may he speak! He is not allowed to elaborate, from his own judgment, conditions of reconciliation. He is not to rely for success on the inventiveness of reason, nor on beguiling acts of sophistry, nor on the persuasiveness of subtle rhetoric. He is to proclaim everywhere, "Thus saith the Lord!" Authority is the weapon on which he is to rely—not human authority, but Divine. He is to be simply the mouthpiece of Deity. But, being *this*, he will become the power of God and the wisdom of God. His business is to speak Divine truth with all the pathos of Divine love.

IV. THE MISSIONARY'S ENCOURAGEMENT. Whether the people would hear, or whether they would forbear, was still an unsolved problem so far as the prophet was concerned. God had not given to him the promise of visible and direct success. But whether they accepted or rejected the Divine overtures, the *end* which God anticipated would be realized. The people should have this conviction inwrought in their minds, viz. that a messenger from God had been among them. This was all that Ezekiel might confidently expect. This was the goal at which he was to aim, viz. to convince them that he was God's prophet—to commend his mission to the consciences of the people. Hence, if no other end was gained, he was not to feel depression of soul. Whether the people relented or further rebelled, he was to continue his simple work; and rest assured that God would defend his own cause, and bring final good out of present evil.—D.

Vers. 6—8.—*God's ambassador a warrior.* The path of duty, since the Fall, is never smooth. We may have an inward sense of delight—tranquil satisfaction, arising from the approval of conscience and the smile of God—but from without we must expect sharp opposition. There is demand for vigilance, skill, and courage.

I. OPPOSITION FORESEEN. Men who have long time departed from God are not easily induced to return. The tree that has grown wildly crooked, cannot readily be restored to straightness and shape. Those who have abandoned the paths of truth and righteousness, sadly degrade their original nature. The cedars are reduced to thorns and briers. Sinners are unprofitable and injurious in the world—a curse to society. They bear no fruit, or only sour and poisonous fruit. They choke the promise of better things. Or they are like scorpions, bent only on mischief. Originally lords of nature, they have sunk to the level of the meanest insects. There is poison in their crafty words. There is a dagger in their very looks.

II. COURAGE DEMANDED. "Be not afraid of them." *Why* should God's servants fear? Our adversaries' words are mere breath. Not a particle of power have they but such as is permitted them by our Master. While they open their mouths in loud boasting, the finger of death is loosening the silver cord within. As the mighty God hath said to the angry waves, so hath he said to these, "Thus far shall ye go, and no further." They may loudly bark, but it is seldom they have power to bite. The fierce opposition of the ungodly may turn to our good; it may and ought to develop our courage. The severer the conflict, the more strength we may gather, and the greater will be our triumph. As they are so zealous in a bad cause, how much more zealous should we be in the very best of enterprises?

III. THE ONLY WEAPON PERMITTED. In this conflict with human folly and rebellion, our only weapon is to be "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." "Thou shalt speak *my* words unto them." If they meet us with contempt and malice, we have but to repeat in calmer tones, and with undisturbed patience, the same facts—the message from the lips of God. Any addition of ours, however suitable it may seem, only weakens the force of the message. We must see to it that the edge of the weapon is not blunted by our own carelessness. Our only concern should be that we do speak all the counsel of God—that it is the Word of God, both in substance and form, which we utter.

IV. AN INSIDIOUS DANGER EXPOSED. "Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house." One foe within the camp is more injurious than a thousand outside. If a germ of disease be in the medicine, it will invalidate all its efficacy. Rebellion assumes a myriad forms. It is a hydra with more than a hundred heads. Listlessness in hearing the heavenly commission—a tampering with its fixed terms, a rash attempt to improve the Divine original—these and such-like acts are seed-germs of rebellion in the soul. "If the salt be deprived of its savour," wherewith shall the corruptions of the world be purged out? An unfaithful ambassador adds fresh aggravation to the revolt of a province. Sin is a contagious evil.—D.

Ver. 9—ch. iii. 3.—"*The bread of heaven.*" The appetites of the human body may be regarded by us as pictures and symbols of the inner hunger of the spirit. Not more surely does the body cry out for food than does the inner man crave for truth. *He* only who has created this complex frame can meet its varied wants.

I. THE HUNGER OF THE SOUL. As the emotional element in man cries out for friendship, as the intellectual asks for knowledge, so the spiritual element eagerly asks after God's will. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" To be out of harmony with God is misery to the soul. To be ignorant of God's purposes and intentions respecting us must bring perpetual disquietude. Hence the question in some form, either vague or clear, is ever rising to the surface, "What must I do to gain eternal life?"

II. DIVINE PROVISION. In order to qualify Ezekiel more fully for his undertaking, a fresh vision was vouchsafed to him. A hand was stretched out from heaven, containing a parchment roll. *In form*, it seemed like the "bread that perisheth;" but it was in truth the heavenly manna—the revelation of Jehovah's will. Man, at the best, is under the dominance of animal appetites; and consequently spiritual facts make most impression on him when presented under material images. But God never deceives. He unfolded the roll; showed him how full it was of instruction and meaning; explained to him its real contents, viz. "mourning, lamentations, and woe." Like unleavened bread and bitter herbs, this knowledge of God's will may be most healthful for men at certain seasons of their life. God's regard for us is too genuine and profound for him to indulge our appetites with dangerous delicacies. The bitter must come before the sweet, darkness before light, sorrow before joy.

III. PERSONAL DIGESTION REQUIRED. The command is heard, "Eat *that* I give thee." "Fill thy bowels with this roll." A superficial acquaintance with God's will is not enough for the prophet's equipment. He must observe, learn, masticate, digest, incorporate, the truth. Here is indeed precious counsel—a Physician's wise advice. Less food, probably, but more digestion. Heavenly counsel *this*, which every disciple should write in golden letters on his chamber walls. The truth which God gives to men does not become really *theirs* until it is assimilated into their own nature—becomes part and parcel of themselves. By examination and reflection and practical obedience, this truth passes into the very blood and nerve and fibre of our being. We *become* the truth—"living epistles, known and read of all men."

IV. THE TASTE PALATABLE AND PLEASANT. "It was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." The regenerate man will welcome *all* the truth of God. Whatever God's will be, he knows that God's will is right, and that righteousness must bring blessing and peace. He is not *now* so blind as to limit his vision to the narrow present; he compasses, in the sweep of his eye, the remote and the future. That the prophet learnt that lamentation and mourning were decreed, was an element of hope. Would the Divine Ruler take such pains with men if he did not intend to do them ultimate good? The very severity of the treatment implied that health would come at last. To do the will of God is always sweet to the renewed man. Unless our spiritual palate is in a diseased condition, every particle of heavenly truth will be "as honey for sweetness." "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and they were unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart."—D.

Vers. 3—8.—*The commission to prophetic service.* "And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel," etc. We have here—

I. A DISCOURAGING SPHERE OF PROPHETIC SERVICE. (Vers. 3, 4.) Ezekiel was sent to: 1. *A people who had mournfully fallen.* "I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me." By descent they were sons of Israel, who had engaged in mighty wrestling with God, and by faith had prevailed; and they ought to have been his sons in character. But instead of that they are here spoken of as "the rebellious nations." The word is plural, as in the margin; and it is that which is used to denote the heathen as distinguished from the people of God. They are designated "nations," as if they had something of the sins of all heathen peoples. They were sadly degenerate branches of a noble root. In former times the Israelites had been the Lord's "peculiar treasure . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. xix. 5, 6); now they were "the rebellious nations that have rebelled against" him. 2. *A people persistently rebellious against God.* Observe the repetition of this charge against them in vers. 3, 5, 6, 7, 8. Their rebelliousness had existed long. Generation after generation they had been revolters against Jehovah. "They and their fathers have transgressed against me unto this very day." The children trod in the sinful steps of their rebellious fathers. Unless restrained by the grace of God, children will imitate their parents, however wicked they may be. Let parents remember the power of their example over their children, and so live that their children may imitate them with advantage. 3. *A people openly obdurate in wickedness.* "They are impudent children, and stiff-hearted." They were hard of face; they had lost shame; they had ceased to blush by reason of their sins. "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush" (Jer. vi. 15). And they were "stiff-hearted"—an expression which denotes steadfastness and determination in their evil ways; they were hardened in wickedness. 4. *A people resolutely hostile to the Lord's prophets.* "Briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks." Three ideas are suggested concerning the people. (1) Their barrenness. They were as destitute of the fruits of righteousness as dry thorns. (2) Their injuriousness. They would prick and sting as briers and thorns. (3) Their venomousness. Like scorpions, they would seek to poison the heart and life of the prophet. They would assail him with envenomed words, and scowling, threatening looks. The life of a prophet of Jehovah was generally one of trial and persecution. Ezekiel is here forewarned of the pains and penalties awaiting him in his future course. In like manner our Lord made known to the twelve apostles the persecutions they would have to encounter in the fulfilment of their mission (Matt. x. 16—22). What an evidence it is of the mercy of God that he should send his prophet to so rebellious a people (cf. Hos. xi. 7—9)!

II. THE SUBLIME CHARACTER OF PROPHETIC SERVICE. It involves two main functions. 1. *Reception of Divine communications.* "Son of man, hear what I say unto thee." The prophet must be a devout listener in the glorious temple of God's great universe. His spiritual ear must be keenly sensitive even to the whispers of the Divine voice. 2. *Publication of Divine communications.* "Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God" (ver. 4). "And thou shalt speak my words unto them." It is his business neither to expound the systems of other men, nor to propound his own opinions, but to declare the Word of the Lord. He must speak what he receives from God; and he must speak it in his Name and by his authority. The Christian minister is an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, offering his pardon, etc. (cf. 2 Cor. v. 20).

III. THE UNCERTAIN RECEPTION OF PROPHETIC SERVICE. "Thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear." It was not granted to Ezekiel to know how his message would be regarded by his fellow-countrymen. He received no assurance that they would hear and heed it. Rather it was suggested to him that they might refuse to hear his testimony. Nevertheless, he must deliver to them the words which he received from God. He must

> "Learn a prophet's duty:
> For this cause is he born, and for this cause,
> For this cause comes he to the world—*to bear*
> *Witness*"

And now the ministers of Jesus Christ must speak his Word faithfully, irrespective of the treatment which is given to that Word. The treatment which the gospel receives from their hearers they are not responsible for; but for fidelity in the proclamation of that gospel they will be held responsible (cf. ch. iii. 16—21).

IV. THE DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT IN PROPHETIC SERVICE. 1. *Obedience to the Divine call demands this service.* "I send thee to the children of Israel" (ver. 3); "I do send thee unto them" (ver. 4); "Be not thou rebellious" (ver. 8). The true prophet, whether Hebrew or Christian, is called of God. He cannot decline the service without grievous unfaithfulness and disobedience. He is encouraged to fulfil it by the fact of the Divine commission; for he who calls strengthens and sustains his servants. 2. *Attention to the Divine exhortations strengthens for this service.* "Be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words," etc. (ver. 6). This exhortation implies that he who gives it will defend his servant. "Be not afraid of their faces; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. i. 8; and see Matt. x. 26—31). 3. *The assurance of its vindication encourages in this service.* "They, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them." Because of his covenant relation to the children of Israel, the Lord will send his prophet unto them. "His testimony, the tidings from him, must be heard in the midst of Israel." The declaration of that testimony was a proof of the fidelity of the Lord to his covenant engagements. And the people should know the genuineness of that testimony. Those who truly heard it would know, by blessed experience of the results of obedience, that a prophet had been among them. And those who rejected it would know by bitter experience, know to their confusion, that a prophet had been among them, and that his words were true. So also shall the mission of every true Christian minister be vindicated, as we see from 2 Cor. ii. 14—16.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let those who have received a mission from the Lord be encouraged to fulfil it.* (Cf. 2 Tim. ii. 1.) 2. *Let those to whom the Word of the Lord is preached "take heed how they hear."*—W. J.

Ver. 9—ch. iii. 3.—*The vision of the roll; or, a view of the prophetic message.* "And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me," etc. This section concerning the roll of prophecy must be looked upon as being of the nature of vision. It pertained not to the external and material, but to the internal and spiritual. It suggests the following observations concerning the prophetic message.

I. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE IS RECEIVED FROM THE LORD. "And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me." The volume was unrolled before him that he might become acquainted with the Divine commission given to him; "undertake his mission with a clear consciousness of its difficulty;" and know the Word of the Lord which he was to proclaim. He was not to promulgate his own thoughts, opinions, or convictions (however true or noble they might have been); but the things which were revealed to him by God. "Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God. . . . And thou shalt speak my words unto them" (vers. 4, 7). And the Christian minister is to "preach the gospel" (Mark xvi. 15), to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. iv. 2), after the example of the apostles who, "when they had preached the Word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel," etc. (Acts viii. 25). "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts v. 42; and cf. 1 Cor. i. 23; 2 Cor. iv. 5; Eph. iii. 8; Col. i. 27, 28).

II. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE IS BOTH LONG AND MOURNFUL. The roll was "written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." This roll is intended to represent the book of the prophet. 1. *It was long.* "Written within and without." Such was the extent and fulness of the revelation that the one side, which generally was alone used for writing on, was insufficient to contain it; both sides were required. 2. *It was mournful.* "There was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe." A correct description of many of the prophecies of this book. How mournful was the moral condition of the people as set forth by the prophet! How woeful the judgments which he proclaimed unto them! Very often the Word of the Lord by the prophets was in fact a heavy "burden" (cf. Isa. xiii. 1; xv. 1; xvii. 1; xix. 1; Nah. i. 1; Hab. i. 1; Zech. ix. 1; xii. 1;

Mal. i. 1). And the Word of the Lord to the rebellious and the hardened (such as the Israelites were) is still a stern word—a word of condemnation and woe. The true prophet cannot prophesy smooth things to stiff-necked sinners. To such characters he must proclaim "the severity of God."

III. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE MUST BE WELL DIGESTED BY THE PROPHET. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll," etc. (ch. iii. 1—3). The meaning of this is given in ch. iii. 10, "Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears." He must receive it, meditate upon it, appropriate it, make it a part of his being. "Here we have the right expression," says Umbreit on eating the roll, "to enable us to form a judgment and estimate of true inspiration. The Divine does not remain as a strange element in the man; it becomes his own feeling thoroughly, penetrates him entirely, just as food becomes a part of his bodily frame." There is need of a similar appropriation of the Word of God by Christian preachers to-day. That Word should be in them not only by intellectual apprehension, but by spiritual assimilation also. It should be not merely on their lips, but in their hearts. This will give the accent and power of conviction to their words when they publish it.

IV. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE WAS DELIGHTFUL UNTO THE PROPHET. "Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." "Thy words were found, and I did eat them," etc. (Jer. xv. 16). It seems strange that this roll of "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" should be sweet to Ezekiel. It was so probably: 1. *Because it was the Word of the Lord.* (Cf. Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 103.) 2. *Because of the honour conferred upon him in making him the agent of the Lord in hearing and speaking that Word.* "It is infinitely sweet and lovely to be the organ and the spokesman of the Most High" (Hengstenberg). 3. *Because even its severest portions were righteous.* There was nothing that would clash with his sense of justice and truth. Says Calvin, "The sweet taste means Ezekiel's approbation of God's judgment and commands." 4. *Because behind the severest judgments there was the grace of the Lord God.* In the roll there were promises of mercy and restoration to the penitent. "Athwart the cloud," says Hengstenberg, "the rainbow gleams. Better to be condemned by God than comforted by the world. For he who smites can also heal, and will heal, if his proclamation of judgment, and the judgment itself, be met by penitence; while, on the other hand, the comfort of the world is vain." So the roll was in the prophet's "mouth as honey for sweetness." Yet there were times when his stern message and his arduous mission were not sweet to him, and he "went in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit" (ch. iii. 14; and cf. Rev. x. 9, 10). The work of the Christian preacher has its sweetness and bitterness; its high and holy joys, and its deep and heart-rending sorrows.

V. THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE MUST BE FAITHFULLY DELIVERED. "Son of man, eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel." Even despite the determined opposition of those to whom he is sent, he must discharge his mission with fidelity (cf. ch. iii. 4—11, the meaning of which is very similar to that of the paragraph, ch. ii. 3—8, which has already engaged our attention). And it is required of the ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ that they be faithful to the great trust which is committed to them (1 Cor. iv. 1, 2; Eph. vi. 21; Col. i. 7; iv. 7; 2 Tim. ii. 2). Blessed are they who in the review of their life can humbly declare, with St. Paul, that they have kept the glorious deposit which was entrusted to them (cf. 1 Tim. i. 11; 2 Tim. iv. 7).—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER III.

Ver. 1.—Eat that thou findest, etc. The iteration of the command of ch. ii 8 seems to imply, like the words, "be not thou rebellious," in that verse, some reluctance on the prophet's part. In substance the command was equivalent to that of Rev. xxii. 18, 19. The true prophet does not choose his message (Acts iv. 20); his "meat" is to do his Lord's will (John iv. 34), and he takes what he "finds" as given to him by that will.

Ver. 3.—It was in my mouth as honey, etc. The words remind us of Ps. xix. 10; Prov. xxiv. 13; and again of those of Jeremiah in the darkest hour of his ministry (xv. 16). They are reproduced yet more closely by St. John (Rev. x. 9). There is, after the first terror is over, an infinite sweetness in the thought of being a fellow-worker with God, of speaking his words and not our own. In the case of St. John, the first sweetness was changed to bitterness as soon as he had eaten it; and this is, perhaps, implied here also in ver. 14. The first ecstatic joy passed away, and the former sense of the awfulness of the work returned.

Ver. 5.—**Of a strange speech and of a hard language, etc.**; literally, as in margin, both of Authorized Version and Revised Version, *to a people deep of lip and heavy of tongue;* i.e. to a barbarous people outside the covenant, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Scythians; not speaking the familiar sacred speech of Israel (compare the "stammering lips and another tongue" of Isa. xxviii. 11; xxxiii. 19). The thought implied is that Ezekiel's mission, as to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24), was outwardly easier than if he had been sent to the heathen. With Israel there was at least the medium of a speech common both to the prophet and his hearers. In ver. 6 the thought is enlarged by the use of "many peoples."

Ver. 6.—**Surely, if I sent thee to them, etc.** The "surely" represents the Hebrew "if not" taken as a strong affirmation, just as "if" in Ps. xcv. 11 represents a strong negation; compare the use of the fuller *formula jurandi* in 1 Sam. iii. 17; 2 Sam. iii. 35; xix. 13; and of the same in Deut. i. 35; Isa. lxii. 8; and in Ezekiel himself (xvii. 19). The margin of the Authorized Version, *If I had sent thee to them, would they not have hearkened*, etc.? expresses the same meaning, but is less tenable as a translation. The thought in either case finds its analogue in our Lord's reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Tyre and Sidon (Matt. xi. 21—24; Luke x. 12—14). Israel was more hardened than the worst of the nations round her.

Ver. 7.—**For they will not hearken unto me, etc.** The words are, as it were, an *à fortiori* argument. Those who had despised the voice of Jehovah, speaking in his Law, or directly to the hearts of his people, were not likely to listen with a willing ear to his messenger. We are reminded of our Lord's words to his disciples in Matt. x. 24, 25. **Impudent and hard-hearted**; literally (the word is not the same as in ch. ii. 4), in Revised Version, *of an hard forehead and of a stiff heart.* The word "hard" is the same word as the first half of Ezekiel's name, and is probably used with reference to it as in the next verse.

Ver. 8.—**I have made thy face strong**; literally, as in the Revised Version, *hard.* Ezekiel's name was at once *nomen et omen.* Hard as Israel might be, he could be made *harder*, i.e. stronger, than they, and should prevail against them (compare the parallels of Isa. l. 7; Jer. i. 18; xv. 20). The boldness of God's prophets is a strictly supernatural gift. Whatever persistency there may be in evil, they will be able to meet it, perhaps to overcome it, by a greater persistency in good.

Ver. 9.—**Adamant.** The Hebrew word *shemir* is used in Jer. xvii. 1 (where the Authorized Version gives "diamond" for a stone used in engraving on gems. In Zech. vii. 12 it appears, as it does here, as a type of exceeding hardness. It is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is commonly identified with the stone known as *corundum*, which appears in some of its forms as the sapphire and the Oriental ruby, and also as the stone the powder of which is used as emery. The special point of the comparison is, of course, that the adamant was actually used to cut either flint itself or stones as hard as flint. **Neither be dismayed at their looks.** The words indicate the extreme sensitiveness of the prophet's natural temperament. He had shrunk not only from the threats and revilings of the rebellious house, but even from their scowls of hatred.

Ver. 10.—**All my words, etc.** The stress lies on the first word. The prophet was not to pick and choose out of the message, but was to deliver "all the counsel of God" (Acts xx. 27). **Take into thine heart, etc.** An inverted order of the two commands would, perhaps, have seemed more natural. What we actually find, however, is sufficiently suggestive. The message of Jehovah is first received into the inner depths of the soul, but in that stage it is vague, undefined, incommunicable. It needs to be clothed in articulate speech before it can be heard with the mental ear and passed on to others. The mouth speaks out of the fulness of the heart.

Ver. 11.—**Get thee to them of the Captivity, etc.** In ch. ii. 3 and iii. 1, 4 the mission had been to "the house of Israel" generally; now it is specialized. He is sent "to them of the Captivity." They are the rebellious house. There is an obvious significance in the phrase, "*thy* people." Jehovah can no longer recognize them as his. The words of ch. ii. 7 are repeated. Here also, even among the exiles, who were better than those that remained in Judah, he was to expect partial failure, but he was not, on that account, to shirk the completion of his task. **Thus saith the Lord God**; *Adonai Jehovah*, as in ch. ii. 4.

Ver. 12.—**Then the Spirit took me up, etc.** The words are to be interpreted as in ch. ii. 2

Luther, however, gives "a wind lifted me up." The parallels of ch. viii. 3 (where, however, we have the addition, "in the visions of God") and ch. xi. 1 suggest the conclusion that this was a purely subjective sensation, that it was one of the phenomena of the ecstatic state, and that there was no actual change of place. On the other hand, the use of like language in the cases of Elijah (1 Kings xviii. 12; 2 Kings ii. 16), of our Lord (Mark i. 12), of Philip (Acts viii. 39), would justify the inference that the prophet actually passed from one locality to the other. The language of 1 Kings xviii. 46 probably points to the true solution of the problem. The ecstatic state continued, and in it Ezekiel went from the banks of Chebar to the dwellings of the exiles at Tel-Abib (see note on ch. i.), at some distance from it. **I heard behind me, etc.** The words imply that the prophet, either in his vision or in very deed, had turned from the glory of the living creatures and of the wheels, and set his face in the direction in which he was told to go. As he does so, he hears the sounds of a great rushing (LXX., *σείσμος*; Luther, "earthquake"), followed by words which, though in the form of a doxology, uttered, it may be presumed, by the living creatures, were also a message of encouragement. His readiness to do his work as a preacher of repentance calls forth the praise of God from those in whose presence there is "joy over one sinner that repenteth." We are reminded of the earthquake in the Mount of Purification and the *Gloria in excelsis* of Dante ('Purg.,' xx. 127—141; xxi. 53—60). The words, from his place (belonging, probably, to the narrative rather than the doxology), point, not to the sanctuary at Jerusalem, which Jehovah had forsaken, but to the region thought of as in the north (see note on ch. i. 4), to which he had withdrawn himself.

Ver. 13.—**And I heard, etc.** There is no verb in the Hebrew, but it may be supplied from ver. 12. We lose in the English the poetry of the original, "kissing, or touching, each its sister." The attitude as of wings raised for flight, and the sound of both the wings and wheels, implied the departure of the glorious vision, presumably to the region from which it came.

Ver. 14.—**The Spirit lifted me up** (see note on ver. 12). Here the LXX. has the more definite phrase, "the Spirit of the Lord." **For bitterness** (see note on ch. ii. 3). **The heat of my spirit.** The first noun is here translated literally. Elsewhere it is rendered as "wrath" (Deut. xxix. 23; Job xxi. 20; Prov. xv. 11, *et al.*), "fury" (Jer. iv. 4). Here probably it points to the conflict of emotions—indignation against the sins of his people, the dread of failure, the consciousness of unfitness. **The hand of the Lord, etc.** The word for "strong" is the same as that which enters into Ezekiel's name. Taking this and ver. 9 into account, there seems sufficient reason for translating as the Vulgate does, *confortans* (so Luther, "held me firm"), at least for thinking of that meaning as implied (comp. Ezra vii. 9; viii. 18; Neh. ii. 8; Dan. x. 18). There was a sustaining power in spite of the "bitterness" and the "heat." In a more general sense, as in ch. i. 3, it is used as implying a special intensity of prophetic inspiration, as in the case of Elisha (2 Kings iii. 15); but this is the only case in which it occurs with the adjective "strong."

Ver. 15.—**At Tel-Abib, etc.** We now enter on the first scene of the prophet's ministry. The LXX. leaves the proper name. The Vulgate rightly translates it as *acervus novarum frugum*, the "mound of ears of corn" (the meaning appears in the name of the Passover month, Abib). Luther gives, strangely enough, "where the almond trees stood, in the month Abib"). Jerome's suggestion, that here also there was a *nomen et omen*, and that those who shared Ezekiel's exile were regarded as the "firstfruits" of the future, is at least ingenious, and finds some support in Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. The place has not been identified, and its position depends on that of the river with which it is connected (see note on ch. i. 1). The word "Tel" is commonly applied to the mounds formed out of masses of ruins, which are common all over the plains of Mesopotamia. The name in this case may suggest that the earth had gathered over it, and that it was cultivated. **I sat where they sat, etc.** The ministry begins not with speech, but silence. Our Western habits hardly enable us to enter into the impressiveness of such a procedure. The conduct of Job's friends (Job ii. 13) presents a parallel, and as Ezekiel seems to have known that book (ch. xiv. 14, 20), he may have been influenced by it. Like actions meet us in Ezra ix. 3—5; Dan. iv. 19.

Ver. 17.—**A watchman unto the house of Israel.** The seven days' session of amazement came to an end, but even then there was at first no utterance of a message. The word of the Lord came to his own soul, and told him what his special vocation as a prophet was to be. He was to be a "watchman unto the house of Israel." He was, like the watchman of a city on his tower, to be on the look out to warn men against coming dangers, not to slumber on his post. In 2 Sam. xviii. 24—27 and 2 Kings ix. 17—20 we have vivid pictures of such a work. It had already been used figuratively of the prophet's work by Jeremiah (vi. 17). The cognate verb, with the image fully developed, meets us in Hab. ii. 1. Its use in Hos. ix. 8 is doubtful as to meaning, and in Isa. lii. 8 and lvi. 10 it may be, if we accept the theory of a Deutero-Isaiah, an echo from Ezekiel. It is reproduced with special emphasis in ch. xxxiii. 2—7. More than any word it describes the special characteristic of Ezekiel's work. He is to watch personally over individual souls. So in a like sense, a corresponding word is used of the Christian ministry in Heb. xiii. 17 (compare also for the thought, though the word is not the same, Isa. xxi. 11, 12; lxii. 6; Ps. cxxvii. 1). A vivid picture of the work of such a watchman is found, it may be noted, in the opening speech of the 'Agamemnon' of Æschylus. **Give them warning, etc.** It is, I think, a legitimate inference that the prophet acted on the command while he was with the exiles and before the departure of ver. 22, not by harangues or sermons addressed to the whole body of the exiles, but by direct warning to individuals.

Ver. 18.—Thou givest him not warning, etc. The word, as in the parallels already referred to, is characteristic of Ezekiel, almost indeed, peculiar to him. Ps. xix. 11 may be noted as another instance of its use. When the watchman saw danger coming, he was to blow the trumpet (ch. xxxiii. 3—6). The prophet was to speak his warnings. **Thou shalt surely die;** literally, *dying thou shalt die.* Were the words of Gen. ii. 17 in the prophet's mind? **To save his life;** literally, *for his life*, or *that he may live.* **Shall die in his iniquity.** Do the words refer only to physical death coming as the punishment of iniquity? or do they point onward further to the judgment that follows death, the loss of the inheritance of eternal life which belongs to those whose names are written in the book of life? Looking to the tremendous responsibility implied in the words, we can hardly, I think, in spite of the questions which have been raised as to the belief of the Hebrews in the immortality of the soul, hesitate to accept the latter meaning. Ezekiel anticipates the teaching of Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5; xiii. 8, if, indeed, that meaning was not already familiar to him in Exod. xxxii. 32, 33. For "in" his iniquity we may, perhaps, read "because of." The negligence of the watchman does not avail to procure a full pardon for the evil-doer. The degree in which it may extenuate his guilt depends on conditions known to God, but not to us. In any case, as in our Lord's words (Luke xii. 47, 48), a man's knowledge and opportunities are the measure of his responsibility. But the unfaithful watchman has his responsibility. It is as though the blood of the sinner had been shed. His guilt may be described in the same words as that of Cain (Gen. ix. 5). Compare St. Paul's words in Acts xviii. 6 and xx. 26 as echoes of Ezekiel's thought.

Ver. 19.—Thou hast delivered thy soul, etc. This phrase is again an eminently characteristic one (comp. ch. xxxiii. 9). Here also, though the words do not necessarily imply more than deliverance from bodily death, thought of as a judgment for negligence, it is, I think, scarcely possible to avoid finding in them a "springing and germinant" sense, analogous to that which we have found in the preceding verse. The dread warning has for its complement a message of comfort. The judgment passed on the prophet does not depend on the results of his ministry. "Whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear," he has "delivered his soul," *i.e.* saved his life, when he has done his duty as a watchman. The phrase is noticeable as having passed out of the language of Scripture into familiar use. A man can say, "Liberavi animam meam," when he has uttered his conviction on any question of importance affecting the well-being of others.

Ver. 20.—From his righteousness. The Hebrew gives the plural, "his righteousnesses"—all his single righteous acts that lie behind. **I lay a stumbling-block, etc.** The word is again characteristic (ch. vii. 19; xiv. 3, 4). It occurs in Jer. vi. 21, and Ezekiel may have learnt the use of the word from him. It is found also in Lev. xix. 14 and Isa. lvii. 14; but the date of these, according to the so-called higher criticism, may be later than Ezekiel. In Isa. viii. 14 the word is different. The English word sufficiently expresses the sense. One of the acts of Eastern malignity was to put a stone in a man's way, that he might fall and hurt himself. Here the putting the stone is described as the act of Jehovah, and is applied to anything that tempts a man to evil, and so to his own destruction (Jer. vi. 21). The thought is startling to us, and seems at variance with true conceptions of the Divine will (Jas. i. 13). The explanation is to be found in the fact that the prophet's mind did not draw the distinction which we draw between evil permitted and the same evil decreed. All, from this point of view, is as God wills, and even those who thwart that will are indeed fulfilling it. Glimpses are given of the purpose which leads to the permission or decree. In the case now before us the man has turned from his righteousness before the stumbling-block is laid in his way. The temptation is permitted that the man may become conscious of his evil (so Rom. vii. 13). If the prophet-preacher does his duty, the man may conquer the temptation, and the stumbling-block may become a "stepping-stone to higher things." If, through the prophet's negligence, he comes unwarned, and stumbles and falls, he, as in the case of the wicked, bears the penalty of his guilt, but the prophet has here also the guilt of blood upon his soul. The "righteousnesses" of the man (here, as before, we have the plural), his individual acts of righteousness, shall not be remembered, because he was tried, and found wanting in the essential element of all righteousness. The highest development of the thought is found in the fact that Christ himself is represented as a "stumbling-stone" (Isa. viii. 14; Rom. ix. 32, 33; 1 Cor. i. 23). St. Paul's solution of the problem is found in the question, "Have they stumbled that they should fall?" (Rom. xi. 11). Was that the end contemplated in the Divine purpose? Will it really be the end?

Ver. 22.—And the hand of the Lord was there upon me, etc. There is obviously an interval between the fact thus stated and the close of the message borne in on the prophet's soul. Psychologically, it seems probable that the effect of the message was to fill him with an overwhelming, crushing sense of the burden of his responsibility. How was he to begin so terrible a work? What were to be the nearer, and the remoter, issues of such a work? Apparently, at least, he does not then begin it by a spoken warning. He passes, at the Divine command borne in on his soul, from the crowd that had watched him during the seven days' silence, and betakes himself to the solitude of the "plain," as distinct from the "mound" where the exiles dwelt, and there the vision appears again in all points as he had seen it when he stood on the river's bank.

Ver. 24.—Go, shut thyself within thy house, etc. The command implied that he was to cease for a time from all public ministrations. There was a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak (Eccles. iii. 7), and for the immediate future silence was the more effective of the two. It would, at least, make them eager to hear what the silence meant.

Ver. 25.—They shall put bands upon thee, etc. Did the warning mean that the prophet's hearers would treat him as the men of Jerusalem treated Jeremiah (xxxii. 3; xxxiii. 1; xxxviii. 6)? Of this, at all events, we have no record, and so far we are led to the other alternative of taking the words (as in ch. iv. 8) in a figurative sense. The prophet would feel, as he stood in the presence of the rebellious house, as tongue-tied, bound hand and foot by their hardness of heart, teaching by strange and startling signs only, and, it may be, writing his prophecies. In ch. xxiv. 27, four years later, and again in ch. xxix. 21, we have a distinct reference to a long period of such protracted silence. We may compare, as in some sense parallel, the silence of Zacharias (Luke i. 22). That silence unbroken for nine months was a sign to those who "were looking for redemption in Jerusalem," more eloquent than speech.

Ver. 27.—When I speak with thee, etc. This then, as ever, was the condition of the prophet's work. He was to speak out of his own heart. When the "time to speak" came words would be given him (Matt. x. 19). And those he would then speak would be as the echo of those in ver. 11. In our Lord's words (Matt. xi. 15; xiii. 9) we have, it may be, a deliberate reproduction of Ezekiel's formula. The LXX., in this instance, it may be noted, translates the second clause by "He who is disobedient (ἀπειθῶν), let him be disobedient," which in its turn finds an echo in Rev. xxii. 11.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*Eating a book.* I. THE FOOD PROVIDED. 1. *This is in the form of literature.* Ezekiel receives a written roll. All good literature is mental food—not merely a plaything or a sweetmeat, but soul-stuff for sustaining intellectual life and promoting mental growth. God feeds our highest nature through literature. His Spirit comes through his Truth, his Truth is revealed in his Word, and his Word is contained in a book—the Bible. 2. This must *be taken as it is provided.* Ezekiel did not write the roll. He found it. The word of God was sent to him. He did not invent or imagine it. We do not create Divine truth. We find it in the Bible. If we would be honest we must take what we discover there, and not feed on our own notions to the neglect of the Divine revelation. 3. *The Divine provision is full and ample.* The roll was inscribed on both sides—"written within and without" (ch. ii. 10). The Bible has far more in it than Ezekiel's roll. It is a library in itself, both extensive and closely filled. There is no verbosity in it. Its many words are rich and deep. No age will ever consume the whole of its vast and varied teachings.

II. THE MEAL CONSUMED. Ezekiel must not only read the roll: he must eat it. All

Divine truth needs to be treated thus. We must feed on the Bible to profit by it. 1. *There must be personal appropriation.* We take a thing to ourselves in the most absolute kind of possession when we eat it. No book will profit much until it is thus appropriated. The bibliomaniac is not always a student of literature. The possession of a large library is no guarantee of great learning. The mind is fed by the books which are studied, not by those that only collect dust as they stand on the shelves. The Bible profits only as it is used. The clasps of some Bibles are suspiciously stiff. They suggest that the books are more prized than searched. 2. *There must be internal consumption.* There is no good in running over the words of a book with the eye, if the thoughts of it are not absorbed into the mind. Good books cannot be profitably skimmed. We may have much verbal knowledge of the Bible without ever making it our food. The meaning of texts, historical and geographical allusions, side-lights of manners and customs, may all be studied, and yet the Bible may lie outside us, and our souls starve for want of spiritual food, because we do not take its essential truths down into our inner being in comprehension, meditation, and application. 3. *There must be assimilation.* The food, when digested, is converted into a part of the bodily fabric—blood, bones, nerves, and flesh. A good book well digested becomes a part of a man's life. It colours his thought and gives tone and character to his mind—its own breadth and elevation enlarging and exalting the reader. This is the highest use of literature. In assimilating Plato or Milton the great souls of the philosopher and the poet take possession of our souls, and lift them into a higher atmosphere.

III. THE EFFECTS FOLLOWING. 1. *There is a pleasant taste.* Ezekiel found the roll as honey for sweetness. The mentally inert have no idea of what rare delights they miss by not preparing themselves to enjoy the pleasures of literature. The writer of Ps. cxix. found the highest of these delights in the Law of God. To the loving student of the Bible that grand ancient literature of man and God is a source of most profound delight. He who truly sympathizes with the spirit in which the Bible was written will never need to read it as a task. He will delight in it as in a savoury meal. 2. *Pain ensues.* This was the case in the parallel vision of St. John (Rev. x. 10). Ezekiel also found bitterness later (ver. 14). The reason is that "lamentations, and mourning, and woe" were written on the roll (ch. ii. 10). There are bitter truths to be considered in God's Word. Conscience makes the pleasant reading of the Bible to be followed by painful reflections. Yet this bitterness is a wholesome tonic. 3. *The final result is an increase of strength.* Ezekiel is able to set his face like an adamant (ver. 9), and prophesy to the rebellious people. Feeding on God's Word fits us to teach that Word and to exemplify it by our conduct.

Ver. 5.—*Colonial missions.* Ezekiel was not sent, like Jonah, to a foreign city; though living among people of a strange language, he was not called upon to preach to the natives. His mission was to a colony of fellow-Jews in a foreign country. He is the typical colonial missionary of the Old Testament.

I. THE CLAIMS OF COLONIAL MISSIONS. Broadly stated, there are two great claims in colonial missions. 1. *Close kinship.* The colonists are our brethren. Charity begins at home, and the English home now stretches to Canada and to Australia. It is stated by those who know our colonies that the affection for the old country is warm among them. To treat them with coldness is a cruel neglect of family ties. 2. *Pressing need.* It has been said that the colonies should provide for their own religious requirements. Such a sweeping statement betrays ignorance of the condition of our colonies. They cannot be lumped together in a mass when we discuss them; for there are enormous differences between the several colonies in regard to resources and capacity for religious activity. An old colony, such as we find in parts of Australia, can well provide for itself. But we have to consider new colonies, cities springing up like mushrooms, with the most raw civilization. Here the fight for life is fierce. Here young men, leaving behind all home influences, find themselves in close companionship with the roughest characters. Little or no provision can be made on the spot for the spiritual assistance of these people. We must follow them into the bush, or leave them to sink to mere animalism.

II. THE DIFFICULTIES OF COLONIAL MISSIONS. 1. *Lack of novelty.* We cannot draw romantic pictures of these missions like those pictures of New Guinea or Central Africa which thrill the spectator with emotion. The work is English, commonplace, without much adventure. But it is only the superficial mind that should be discouraged by so childish an objection when real need presses. 2. *Roughness of character.* The backwoodsmen may not speak a rough dialect, but the freedom of their life tempts into their neighbourhood some of the wildest characters. Two classes emigrate—the most energetic and best workmen, who go of their own accord; and the most worthless persons, who are sent by their friends. We ship our "ne'er-do-weels" off to the colonies. But change of scene does not bring change of character. Those who were scoundrels in the streets of London do not become all of a sudden respectable citizens in Melbourne. While we continue to pour into our colonies the scum and refuse of the old world, a great burden is being laid upon these young communities to protect themselves from dangerous influences. 3. *Width of area.* The colonies are vast in extent, yet they are but thinly peopled. The colonial missionary must travel far. His parish may be as large as a county. Men of great energy and devotion are required for such work.

III. The encouragements of colonial missions. 1. *Readiness of access.* Travelling is safe. There are no native chiefs to conciliate. The interference of a foreign government has not to be considered. The colonists speak our own language, and thus no time is spent in learning a foreign tongue before the real work begins. The missionary has the claims of kinship to help him. 2. *A great future.* No missions have been more successful than those to the South Sea Islands, yet the population of those islands is rapidly dwindling away, and in course of time all effects of the missions will have vanished, simply because the people will have died out. It is just the opposite in the case of our colonies. There population advances by leaps and bounds. Greater Britain is already one of the wonders of the world. If Christianity loses hold of this young giant, the ultimate result will be disastrous to mankind; but if the colonies are won for Christ, the freshest, strongest, most promising life of the world is secured for the cause of truth and righteousness. Moreover, no work is so remunerative in result as successful colonial missions. The new Churches have only to be planted and fostered for a time. Before long they will stand alone and become centres of usefulness. While foreign mission Churches are too much like the ivy, that must always cling to an external support, colonial Churches are like the saplings, needing a stake for a time to keep them straight and to help them to stand against the gale, but which can soon dispense with that aid. Lastly, where colonies are planted among native races, colonial missions may save these poor creatures from the ruin which bad white men always bring, and thus the colonies may become centres of Christianizing influence for the heathen.

Ver. 9.—*Adamant.* I. What it is for the forehead to be of adamant. 1. *It is external hardness.* Zechariah writes of those who "made their *hearts* as an adamant stone" (vii. 12). Ezekiel is not to do this; he only has his *forehead* made as adamant. The adamantine heart is a sign of sin. It is sure to fail in all attempts at spiritual work. We must feel sympathy with those whom we would help. But it is possible to have a "tough skin with a tender heart." Unfortunately, those people who are pachydermatous are also too often tough-hearted. Yet the forehead of adamant does not imply want of sensitiveness to the finer feelings. It only means a certain callousness in regard to external criticism. 2. *It is hardness against hindrances to progress.* The adamant is to be in the forehead, in the front. It is like Christian's armour, with a good breastplate, but no protection for his back. We want most strength and security in advancing. 3. *It is hardness before the seat of thought.* The forehead guards the brain. Much may move our hearts, but no human considerations should shake our convictions. 4. *It is hardness before a vital organ.* The brain must be sheltered, or the life will be forfeited. We may bear attacks on the outworks of our religious life. The crowning citadel of faith must not be touched.

II. Why the forehead should be of adamant. 1. *It is required by the opposition of men.* Ezekiel had to face fierce opponents. The servant of truth must often encounter unpopularity. If men always speak well of a Divine messenger, there is a suspicion of weakness in following the popular whims. There must be unpleasant truths for the faithful preacher to declare. 2. *It is necessary for success.* The prophet must guide, mould, influence men. If he is but a weather-cock, his mission has failed. Often he must set himself like a rock in the middle of a raging torrent. Decision and firmness are essential in the work of a leader of men. The Christian minister who is afraid of his congregation has forfeited all right to be their teacher. 3. *It is demanded by loyalty to God.* The prophet is God's messenger. The Christian minister is Christ's servant. To his own Master he stands or falls. Obsequiousness before men means a betrayal of the duty owed to God.

III. How the forehead may become of adamant. Many of the truest servants of God are naturally so sensitive and timorous that they well need some such assurance as that given to Ezekiel. Now, God had made his prophet's forehead as adamant. It is a Divine work. But there are human ideas through which he works. 1. *God is to be feared more than man.* We must remember that "the fear of man . . . bringeth a snare." While shrinking from man's petty anger we risk the awful thunders of the wrath of God. 2. *Trust is to be put in the protection of God.* He will not desert his own agents at the post of peril. When men do their worst, Almighty aid is at hand. If death is to be encountered, there is the martyr's crown beyond. 3. *There must be a deep conviction of the truth of our message.* A wavering mind will not support a countenance of adamant. We must first be *sure* ourselves. Then we can dare to face the world. Truth is the adamant that hardens the forehead against unbelief, misrepresentation, opposition. It has been well said, "Those men are strongest who stake most on a deep and worthy conviction." 4. *An honest kindness of intention will create the firmness of adamant.* Selfishness wavers; sympathy is strong. The murderer's hand trembles; the surgeon's hand is steady, though his patient shrieks under the knife. When we earnestly desire to benefit people, we can afford to have them misunderstand us, and perhaps even smile when they cry out against our unkindness. Mixed motives weaken the front we present to the world. A pure, unselfish devotion will be brave, strong, firm as adamant.

Ver. 14.—*The start in life.* Ezekiel here describes the commencement of his active ministry. Hitherto he has been under preparation, receiving communications from heaven in vision and word. Now the time has come for him to start on his errand and begin his work among the captives of Babylon.

I. The prophet is carried away by the Spirit of God. Although we need not suppose that Ezekiel was carried up bodily into the clouds, blown over the fields, and dropped down in the midst of a crowd of his countrymen, we are not to suppose that his visit to them was any the less one of Divine impulses. Like Philip the evangelist, when he was taken from the Ethiopian convert and sent to Azotus (Acts viii. 39, 40), Ezekiel felt a mighty power of God driving him to his work. Inspiration does not only illumine; it impels. The Spirit of God *drove* Christ into the wilderness (Mark i. 12). Such an action does not involve forcible constraint against the will. God only works on men in this way through their wills. The will of the man is so completely subservient to the will of God that it no longer acts separately; it voluntarily obeys as though it were but a Divine instrument. The highest work for God is always done in this way. Without the mighty spiritual impulse such tasks as God sets his servants could never be accomplished; but with it the hardest service ends in success.

II. The prophet goes in grief and anger. 1. *In grief.* The prophet is in bitterness. The cause of his sorrow is that he is to speak of bad subjects, and to face unwilling hearers. Nothing can be more painful to a sympathetic soul. If a preacher could delight in denunciation and take a pleasure in describing the horrors of future punishment, he would be little better than a demon at heart. A true preacher of repentance must be a voice of sorrow. Moreover, it must be painful to a sensitive man to find himself compelled to create unpopularity for himself by fidelity to his message. His face may be as adamant; but his heart will bleed. 2. *In anger.* Ezekiel went "in heat." There is a righteous wrath. Christ could be "moved with indignation" against cruelty and hypocrisy. The man who is incapable of this anger lacks power of conscience. Love must lie at the heart of the servant of God, but anger at sin and at the wrong of it to God and man may show itself in his voice and manner.

III. The prophet feels the mighty hand of God upon him. God does not only send his servant; he accompanies him. The Spirit carried Ezekiel forth; the hand of God was strong upon him all the way. This hand of God is felt in various ways. 1. *In pushing forward.* God thus keeps his servants to the front. While he is with them he will allow of no cowardice or indolence. 2. *In support.* This hand of God is a helping hand, a holding hand, a supporting hand. God sustains those whom he sends. 3. *In restraint.* While pushing his servants on in the right way, God is ready to hold them back from peril, error, and ruin. 4. *In uplifting.* The servants of God may slip and even fall. Then they are not deserted. The same strong hand which sent them forth lifts them up and sets them on their feet again. Thus the mighty ever-present God stands by to help his feeblest servants and lead them on to victory.

Ver. 15.—*Silence.* When Ezekiel came upon a settlement of captives he sat down with them in silent amazement for seven days. At the end of that time a Divine message roused him, and sent him forth on his mission. We have now to consider the lessons of the week of silence. They may be the more valuable for us because we seem to have lost the faculty of keeping quiet. The rush and roar of modern life have killed that ancient power, and its depth and spiritual range are lost to us. No doubt much of the superficiality and unreality of modern life may be traced to the habit of ceaseless chatter. It would be well if we could rediscover silence. Silence has many shades according to the varying circumstances in which it arises and the diverse moods in which it is cherished. Some of the characteristics of silence are illustrated in the case of Ezekiel.

I. THE SILENCE OF GRIEF. Ezekiel grieved to see the sorrowful state of his fellow-captives, and to think that it was his mission at first even to add to their distress by words of rebuke and warning. Like a true patriot, he found the troubles of his countrymen occasions of personal mourning. As a tender-hearted man, he could not fail to be pained at their moral shame and peril. Their grief silenced his voice. The greatest sorrow lies too deep for words. The widow of Tennyson's "warrior" was stricken into a fearful silence. Referring to a season of extreme trouble, David said, "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace" (Ps. xxxix. 2). Thus terrible blows stun the sufferer.

II. THE SILENCE OF WONDER. The prophet was astonished. The fearful spectacle of his kindred in distress overwhelmed him with amazement. A great surprise produces a shock of silence, by throwing us off the familiar lines of thought, so that we know not what to think or say. It is fortunate for us that this is the case, or we might blunder into some very rash expressions. We may well be silent before "the burden and the mystery of all this unintelligible world."

III. THE SILENCE OF SYMPATHY. Job's three friends "sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job ii. 13). In the deepest trouble the kindest words sound harsh. You cannot handle an open wound in the most tender manner without giving pain. A look of sympathy is more helpful than a speech of most choice phrases. To weep with those who weep is better than to preach to them.

IV. THE SILENCE OF ANTICIPATION. Ezekiel has not received the message which he is to give to the captives. So he waits for it in silence. Having as yet no utterance to give, he is wise in keeping his lips closed. It has been truly remarked that we should not attempt to speak because we have to say something, but only because we have something to say. Macaulay delighted his companions by "flashes of silence" in the torrent of his conversation. It would be well if some of us kept longer silence, that when we did open our mouths some words of weight might come forth. It is good to understand the feeling of 'Il Penseroso,' and to be able to welcome the "spirit of contemplation"—

"Come, pensive nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure."

Ver. 17.—*The watchman.* (See on ch. xxxiii. 1—9.)

Vers. 17—21.—*Varieties of judgment.* The duties and responsibilities of the prophet as a watchman, which are here first described, receive more elaborate attention later in the book, where therefore they can be best studied. The other side of the subject—

that which concerns the guilt and dangers of the people, which is also set forth in the passage before us—is worthy of grave consideration on its own account. Let us take that alone now.

I. JUDGMENT IS DETERMINED BY PERSONAL GUILT. God is discriminating and fair. He does not deal out judgment in the gross; each case is taken in detail. There is to be no wholesale deluge of future retribution; every man will bear his own share of guilt. There will be differences between the treatment of one sinner and that of another. Differences in conduct and circumstances are noted. Temptation is weighed on the one side; light and opportunity on the other. The child of the thieves' den cannot be judged as the son of a Christian home. The ignorance of the heathen puts them in quite another category in the day of judgment from that in which the favoured inhabitants of Christendom will stand. There is thus not only a difference between the guilt of different deeds—as of minor morals or great crimes; there is also a difference in the guilt of similar deeds committed by people differently situated.

II. JUDGMENT IS AFFECTED BY AFTER-CONDUCT. The whole passage treats of this after-conduct. It presupposes that sin has been committed. Yet it shows a variety of possibilities according to subsequent behaviour. We cannot return on the past. History is not to be wiped out. What is done remains as a fact accomplished. Yet its evil fruit may be crushed, or it may be eaten to the last bitter morsel. Later conduct may aggravate the guilt, deepen the black dye, and add to the weight of the impending conduct. Or it may be such as to lift the load of doom and open a door of escape. We have to do with a personal God, not with a blind Nemesis. God rules by law, but this law is not a mechanical system. Therefore: 1. There is hope for the worst of men. None need despair. 2. It is wrong and foolish for the sinner to be reckless. Nobody's fate is so bad that it cannot be made worse. Even the vilest sinner may be warned of the danger of intensifying his already heinous guilt and multiplying the many stripes which he has already earned. The possibilities of evil are infinite; so also are the possibilities of heightened penalties. As there are third heavens and seventh heavens, so are there deeper and darker and yet more horrible inner circles of future punishment.

III. GUILT VARIES ACCORDING TO THE SINNER'S WARNING AND HIS TREATMENT OF IT. Here are four possible cases. 1. *The unwarned sinner suffers.* He cannot be excused because no prophet was sent him. On the face of it this looks unjust; but it is not so, since no man could have been a sinner at all unless he had known he was doing wrong. Therefore by the light of his own conscience he must be judged and condemned. Moreover, the moral degradation of sin in the heathen and in ignorant people nearer home is a fact that must bring its natural consequences. If only the pure in heart can see God, the impure must miss the beatific vision by lack of faculty to receive it. Sin kills the soul by natural necessity. 2. *The warned sinner who persists suffers a worse penalty.* He not only dies. His blood is on his own head. This must imply an aggravation of guilt and a consequent increase of punishment. 3. *The fallen righteous man is punished, though he is not warned.* His previous goodness gives him no immunity in present sin. He of all men can plead no excuse in the lack of warning, for certainly he should have known his danger. His eyes were once open. He may have been careless and surprised into sin. But this would not destroy guilt, for should he not have watched and prayed against entering into temptation? 4. *The fallen righteous man who repents on receiving warning is forgiven.* He is judged by his returning course of conduct. Too often despair follows the fall of good men, or reckless indifference. But the grace of Christ is for his own repentant people, as well as for those who had never known him. He who bade his disciples forgive seventy times seven offences is as long-suffering and patient in his own treatment of genuine penitents among his brethren.

Vers. 22—24.—*On the plain and in the house.* The prophet is sent first into the plain and then into his house. In both cases he follows Divine leadings. In both he is separated from his friends and neighbours. But there are certain differences between the two experiences, all full of significance.

I. ON THE PLAIN. 1. *The scene.* If Ezekiel was sent into the plain, this must have been because it was a place adapted to what was to happen there. Its characteristic features must enter into the significance of the prophet's errand. Note some of these. (1) *Retirement from society.* The mournful crowd of Jews was by the river-bank, and Ezekiel was to detach himself from them and retreat to the solitude of the plain. It is not good for man to live in a crowd. Depth of soul is to be cultivated in retirement. God does not often reveal himself in the din of the world. A too public life is both shallow and callous. (2) *Breadth of view.* The plain is broad and spacious. There is ample range for the eye to rove over its vast expanse. The soul may here lose its cramped feelings. The suffocation of the crowd is escaped. When God's glory appears it has room for a large display. Heavenly painting requires a broad canvas. (3) *Openness to heaven.* There is no roof over the plain. You can look thence right up to the sky. The lark can rise from his nest on the plain and soar as high as his unwearied wings will bear him. We want freedom from earthly limitations. The smoke of the city hangs over the haunts of men. We must go forth from all human entanglements to seek free intercourse with God. 2. *The events.* Once on the plain this man of visions, the Prophet Ezekiel, saw new wonders, and there the glory of God appeared to him. Other men had been on the plain before; wild tribes of the desert have ranged over it since, and perhaps herded their cattle or pitched their tents on the very site of the great revelation. Yet to them the heavens have been as brass. Fitting scenes may prepare us for heavenly visions, but they cannot create them. When the glory is revealed no higher privilege could be vouchsafed. It is worth any journey—if need be, across Siberian plains—to have such a privilege. No longer do we look for this in outward show. But there may be a Divine glory upon the plain to the naturalist who examines the meanest weed that grows there, as an angel of Divine revelation, an embodiment of heavenly wisdom and beauty.

II. IN THE HOUSE. The sight of the glory on the plain smites the prophet to the ground with awe and reverence. But he is not to lie there dismayed. Heavenly words follow the heavenly vision, and these words have a practical import. God does not reveal himself only to dazzle beholders with a splendid pageant. A vision of glory is not enough without a message of truth. Revelation makes known the mind of God. So the voice speaks, and speaks with a practical aim, bidding the amazed prophet arise and go to his house. 1. *The scene.* (1) *The greatest privacy.* On the plain Ezekiel was in retirement. In the house he is in seclusion. Christ bade his disciples go into their closet, and shut the door, to pray to their Father in secret (Matt. vi. 6). (2) *Separation from the external world.* On the plain a man has space; at home he is shut in by four walls. On the plain he is open to the voices of nature; alone in the house he is left to subjective experiences. (3) *Cessation of work.* The prophet must leave his ministry for a season, and wait in patience. 2. *The use of this scene.* Retirement and seclusion give a time of rest, which all busy workers need. They afford opportunities for meditation and prayer. Here the soul can take stock, can review its forces, can seek fresh supplies. Note: Ezekiel sees the vision on the plain before he goes to retire to the solitude of his house. To be profitable, meditation must be based on revelation.

Ver. 25.—*A prophet stricken dumb.* This is something abnormal, almost monstrous. A prophet is a speaker by calling. His mission is to use his voice. Something is strangely amiss if he is to be driven to silence. The occurrence, the causes, and the consequences of such a phenomenon must be of exceptional importance.

I. THE FACT. The prophet's tongue is to cleave to the roof of his mouth. If he would speak, he shall not be able to do so. Then, as before the time of Samuel, the word of the Lord must be "rare" (1 Sam. iii. 1). Divine messages cease. 1. *No light.* The sun is eclipsed. At noon it is night. Truth sinks into obscurity. Heaven ceases to have a meaning. Man is left to earth alone. 2. *No guiding hand.* Left in the dark, people may plunge into quagmires of error or fall into pits of destruction; there is no warning to keep them safe. 3. *No commanding voice.* Now the people feel free to choose their own course. 4. *No consolation nor message of grace.* The prophets were not all Cassandras, nor was every message a prediction of judgment. These men were the consolers of the sorrowful. They bore Messianic messages of hope. Now their words are hushed. If the black thunder-cloud is dispelled, so also is the rainbow that spanned it.

II. THE CAUSE. 1. *By the power of God.* It is God who paralyzes the tongue of his servant. This is no matter of wilful reticence or sullen silence on the part of the prophet. If God sends a message, he can also withhold one. Revelation is not extorted from heaven by cunning sorcery. It is freely vouchsafed by the will of God, and if he chooses to hide it, no skill or might of man can extract it. The lips of the prophet from whom God has withheld a message are as surely sealed to all new Divine revelation as the lips of a corpse. The dead can tell no secrets, the uninspired prophet can make no revelation. 2. *On account of man's sin.* This is a judicial act. God does not work in caprice. But neither does he act with mechanical uniformity. He will not waste his gracious words for ever. Christ warned his disciples not to cast their pearls before swine. How many have heard the gospel so often and heeded it not, that they may well feel they deserve to be shut out from hearing it any more! Why should the sower cast his seed by the wayside again, only to be trodden underfoot or stolen by the wild birds?

III. THE PURPOSE. There must be an object in this cessation of prophecy, and that object must be more than the mere economy of effort. God has positive ends in view in all that he does, for he is ever advancing to larger good, and never simply withdrawing from fruitless fields as though frustrated and confined to a smaller area. At first the cessation of prophecy may be accepted as a relief from inconvenient admonition. It used to remind men of ugly facts—of sins committed and duties neglected. Now they are free from its annoying insistence. But presently other effects may be seen. 1. *To show the value of what was neglected.* Though we may not recognize the fact, the presence of a Divine voice is a great boon—it is light and counsel and help. Men may learn to value it when they have lost it. We do not know how precious our friends were till they are taken from us. Perhaps we were sometimes irritated by what they said. Oh that we could have them back now that we have learnt their value! But it is too late. 2. *To speak by silence.* Many words have failed. Silence itself may be eloquent. The very cessation of prophecy may provoke reflection on the old messages. 3. *To spare the aggravation of guilt.* The more words of warning are unheeded, the worse is the guilt of the rejection.

Ver. 27.—*Liberty of hearing.* Jeremy Taylor wrote on 'Liberty of Prophesying,' when that right had been interfered with unjustly. In more lawless times liberty of hearing has also been put under restraint. Where it is unhampered it brings its own responsibility. Now we all have liberty of hearing. The use and abuse of this liberty call for some consideration.

I. THE USE OF THE LIBERTY OF HEARING. 1. *All men are free to hear God's Word.* This is not a message for the priests; it is given to the people. It is not sent to the few *elite;* it belongs to the multitude. There is no esoteric doctrine in the Christian revelation. 2. *All men can understand the Divine Word.* Little children can grasp its most precious truths. Simple folk can receive what is vital and most valuable. The path is such that a wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein if he follows it with a true heart. 3. *All men have a right to receive God's Word.* It is our duty to circulate the Bible throughout the world. If God has given utterances that are intended for all peoples and nations and languages and tongues, it is the duty of those to whom these oracles of God have been committed to see that everything is done to put them within the reach of those who have not yet received them. 4. *All men to whom the Word of God has come are under a solemn obligation to give heed to it.* Liberty does not exonerate from duty; on the contrary, it is the essential condition of the performance of any duty as such. If God speaks, we *can* refuse to hearken, but we *ought* to listen; and only by thus listening can the Word of God be of any profit to us.

II. THE ABUSE OF THE LIBERTY OF HEARING. It is possible to forbear, if the hearing is within our own power. God forces no one to hear his Word, nor does he force any one to enter his kingdom. The good Shepherd seeks the wandering sheep, but when he finds it he does not drive it before him; he calls it to him, and even then, if the foolish creature is so madly inclined, it can turn a deaf ear to his merciful voice. 1. *It would be useless to compel a hearing.* God does not desire unwilling service. The revelation that is not welcome can bring little good. God blesses us through our own acquiescence; in the rebellious heart the blessing would be soured into a curse. 2. *To be understood, the Word of God must be received sympathetically.* This is not a statement of external facts so much as a light to shine into the heart. If, therefore, the language of it were dinned into our ears, syllable by syllable, the spirit, the truth itself, would still remain outside. We should hear the sounds, not the message they contained. 3. *To refuse to hear the Word of God is to incur a grave responsibility.* As a word of command it requires obedience. To decline to receive the message is to rebel and disobey. As a word of grace this Divine utterance offers a boon. To refuse it is to insult the gracious Speaker. It is also to run the risk of severe judgment when we fail for lack of that which would have saved us if we had given attention to it. They who act thus are without excuse. It will be "more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon" in the day of judgment than for such.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4—7.—*The privileged and the unprivileged.* It is impossible to read this language without being reminded of the parallel language recorded to have been uttered by our Lord Jesus Christ. The Prophet Ezekiel was assured that, whilst his message would be rejected by his fellow-countrymen, it would have been received with gratitude and faith had it been addressed to a Gentile nation. And our Lord, in upbraiding the unbelief of Capernaum, declared that the tidings he proclaimed would have been received with joy and would have induced repentance had they been addressed to Tyre and Sidon—nay, to Sodom and Gomorrah! It must indeed have rendered the mission of Ezekiel doubly difficult to be assured beforehand of the hardness of heart and the incredulity of the house of Israel. Yet it was a divinely appointed discipline to which he was subjected; and it was a wholesome, albeit a painful, preparation for the discharge of a distressing service, to be told that his words should be rejected, and yet to be bidden to utter them in the name and by the authority of his God.

I. THE LESS FAVOURED WOULD WELCOME THE DIVINE MESSENGER AND THE DIVINE MESSAGE. People of a strange speech, the prophet was assured, would, had he been sent to them, certainly have hearkened unto him. How is this to be accounted for? Such people would have been favourably inclined to the herald of God's justice and mercy: 1. By their *surprise* at an unwonted instance of God's condescension and gracious interest. 2. By their *gratitude* for words of warning and of promise. 3. By their *responsiveness* to the interposition on their behalf of a new power brought to bear upon their moral nature. 4. By the hope of Divine acceptance and of a new and better life awakened by the summons in their nature.

II. THE HIGHLY FAVOURED WILL MEET THE DIVINE MESSENGER AND THE DIVINE MESSAGE WITH INDIFFERENCE, UNBELIEF, AND IRRESPONSIVENESS. 1. Privilege is often associated with moral obduracy. The expression used is very severe: "Of a hard forehead, and of a stiff heart." It is observable, and very significant, that the historians and prophets of the Hebrews, so far from flattering their countrymen, used with regard to them language of stern upbraiding and denunciation, reproached them with their unbelief, rebelliousness, hardness of heart, and stiff-necked attitude towards Divine authority. And such reproach was abundantly justified by the facts of their history. They were chosen to privilege, not in virtue of any excellence of their own, but in the sovereign wisdom and mercy of the Lord. The more God did for them, the less they heeded his commandments. Not that this condemnation applied to all; there were those "faithful among the faithless;" but generally speaking, the Jews were a disobedient and rebellious race. 2. This moral obduracy leads to the rejection of God's messengers. "The house of Israel"—so the Lord forewarned Ezekiel—"will not hearken unto thee." The same truth was expressed by our Lord himself centuries afterwards, when he reproachfully reminded his kindred according to the flesh that through long centuries messengers from God had been sent to their forefathers, only to be ill treated, wounded, and slain. Ezekiel was only to be treated as similarly authorized messengers of God both before and afterwards. 3. God's messengers are rejected by those who have rejected God himself. Most terrible are the words of the Lord to Ezekiel: "They will not hearken unto *thee*; for they will not hearken unto ME." God had spoken unto Israel in the events of past history, and in the directions and reproaches of conscience. Ezekiel might well believe that there was no special reason why they should listen to him; but he was well aware that there is no sin more awful than the refusal to listen to the Eternal himself, all whose words are true and just, wise and good. It was not a case for personal feeling, a case of offence given and taken. Such feeling would have been out of place. The serious aspect of Israel's unbelief was just this—it was unbelief of God; they turned away from the voice that spake from heaven.

Application. The privileges of those who, in this Christian dispensation, hear the gospel of salvation preached to them, far exceed the privileges of the ancient Hebrews. To reject the testimony of Christ's ministers is to reject Christ himself, as our Lord has explicitly declared. The condemnation and guilt are tenfold when men harden their hearts, not only against the authority of the Divine Law, but against the pleadings of Divine love.—T.

Vers. 8, 9.—*The fearlessness of the Lord's messenger.* After hearing that Israel would give no heed to his prophetic messages, the Prophet Ezekiel must have needed strong encouraging. It is always depressing to engage in a hopeless undertaking. Yet there was a moral necessity for the mission to be fulfilled. And the Lord strengthened and fortified his servant for his painful duty by breathing into him a Divine courage, and by bidding him dismiss all fear. Although Ezekiel's position was very special, every servant and herald commissioned by the Most High to witness on his behalf to his fellow-men has frequent need of such encouragement as that imparted to the prophet of the Captivity.

I. The outward occasions of fear. There are many circumstances which are likely to arouse the apprehensions, and so to depress the energies, of God's messengers to their fellow-men. 1. Want of sympathy with his message on the part of those to whom he is sent. 2. An attitude of deliberate indifference and unbelief. 3. Determined resistance and resentment. 4. Threats of personal violence. The former occasions of fear are such as every minister of religion must expect to encounter. But the Hebrew prophets sometimes met with actual ill treatment—blows, bonds, and death. So it was with the apostles of our Lord, and so it has been with missionaries of the cross, who have fulfilled their ministry among the unenlightened, prejudiced, and hostile heathen. Many have "resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

II. The inward inclination to fear. There is great difference in the matter of constitutional temperament; some men are naturally timid, and prone to be overawed by opposition and intimidation, whilst others have a certain delight in antagonism, and care not what odds are against them in the conflict. 1. Sometimes the messenger of God is too prone to regard his own peace and comfort, and is averse to any step which may bring him into collision with others. 2. The feeling on the part of God's servant, that he is but one against many, inclines him to retirement and reticence. 3. And this is increased when there is no countenance or support from colleagues in labour and warfare. The consciousness of personal feebleness and insufficiency, combined with the feeling of isolation, may naturally account for the prevalence of fear in the presence of difficulty, opposition, and hostility. He who made man, and who is perfectly acquainted with human nature, is aware that his servants are subject to such infirmities, and that they need accordingly a special provision of Divine grace to fortify them against the spiritual danger to which they are exposed.

III. The Divine preservative from fear. 1. The consciousness of a message from God to be delivered, whether man will hear or forbear, is fitted to take away all dread of men's displeasure, as well as all undue desire for men's favour. 2. The assurance that Divine authority accompanies the Lord's servant is in itself sufficient to make his face and his forehead hard as adamant in the presence of opponents whose only authority lies in force or in the conventional greatness attaching to earthly rank or station. 3. To this is added the express promise of God's aid. The opponents may be mighty; but the soldier of truth and of righteousness has the assurance that he who is with him is mightier still. "Fear not," says the Almighty, "for I am with you."—T.

Ver. 10.—*The inpouring of Divine fulness.* A great and strong nature is sometimes observed to obtain a vast ascendancy over others, to communicate opinion, to exercise influence, to control, to impel, to restrain, to inspire. Now, the prophet is the man to whom the Lord, who is the eternal Truth and Wisdom and Authority, stands in such a relation. As is strikingly described in the text, God pours into the ears and the heart of the prophet the words which are the expression of his infinite mind and will, and thus fits him to stand as his own representative before his fellow-men. There was no doubt a special immediateness in this relation between God and the ancient prophets such as Ezekiel; yet the remarkable language of this passage may justly be taken as describing the intercourse which exists between the Father of spirits and those whom he has made partakers of his nature and of his truth and life and love.

I. THE ABUNDANCE OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. There is grandeur in the language here attributed to the Eternal: "All my words that I shall speak unto thee." How can we gather up into one apprehension all the communications, the words, addressed by God to man? 1. *All nature* may fairly be regarded as the speech of him who, being at once the Father of spirits and the Author of the universe, makes use of the works of his hands as the medium by which to communicate with the beings whom he has endowed with capacities for knowing himself and for sharing in his character. 2. Man's *moral nature* is in an especial manner the organ by which the Creator reveals his most venerable and admirable attributes; unless man had a heart to feel, he would remain for ever a stranger to the glorious character of his God. 3. The text refers undoubtedly to *a special revelation* accorded to selected individuals for definite purposes. And although there are those who would admit the manifestations of God previously described, and yet would question the reality of a supernatural revelation, there are good reasons for believing that we are indebted to such special provision for not a little of our most precious knowledge of our God.

II. THE OBSTACLES TO HUMAN RECEPTIVENESS. These are not so much intellectual as moral. It is the worldly nature, engrossed with the pursuits of earth and the pleasures of sense, that repels Divine communications. The atmosphere is too dense and foggy for the rays of Divine righteousness and purity to pierce. It is sin which makes the ear deaf and the heart impenetrable so that the words of wisdom and of love die away unheeded and unheard.

III. THE PENETRATION AND OCCUPATION OF HUMAN NATURE BY THE IMPARTING OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. The purpose of the Eternal was that the whole being of the "son of man" should be taken up and occupied by the words to be uttered. And surely this is the intention of God regarding, not Ezekiel alone, but every child of man. There is no obstacle upon the Divine side. On the contrary, the purpose of infinite benevolence is that our humanity may be receptive of Divine blessing. 1. Divine *truth* is intended to fill the intelligence. 'In God's light it is for us to see light. Truth regarding God and man, and regarding God's relation to man, is communicated in wonderful and abundant measure to the truth-seeking soul, and especially by him who is "the Truth." 2. Divine *love* is intended to fill the heart. 3. Divine *authority* is intended to control the will—the active nature of man. 4. And Divine *service* is intended to fill man's life, so that the words of God may produce their perfect fruit in the actions and the habits of man.—T.

Vers. 12, 13.—*Celestial voices.* As a true prophet, Ezekiel was specially susceptible to spiritual influences. Again and again he speaks of the Spirit as taking possession of him, placing him in new circumstances, enlarging his experiences, qualifying him for special ministries. Divesting ourselves of the notion that such interpositions are to be interpreted as mechanical and local, we must seek to enter into their spiritual significance. The interest of this passage largely lies in its bearing upon the prophet's own personal history and ministerial service.

I. CELESTIAL VOICES CAME TO ONE WHO HAD JUST PASSED THROUGH VERY DISHEARTENING EXPERIENCES. 1. Ezekiel had been reminded of the unbelief and rebelliousness of his countrymen, to whom it was his vocation to minister. Their character had been described to him in language of the truth of which he was too well aware. To preach to the hardened and unsympathetic is no pleasant task. Yet it is a task to which every minister of religion is often called. His is frequently the voice of one crying in the wilderness. And again and again has he been cast down and distressed in spirit when thus encountered by prejudice, worldliness, and unbelief. 2. Ezekiel had been made to feel the difficulties arising from the feebleness and insufficiency of the spiritual labourer. It is hard to face a powerful foe; but to do so becomes harder when the warrior is conscious of his own weakness. And this has been the experience of every faithful servant of God. Often has the minister of Christ, overpowered by a sense of his impotence, cried aloud, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

II. CELESTIAL VOICES COME TO REANIMATE, TO COMFORT, AND TO STRENGTHEN THE SERVANT OF GOD. When the prophet was depressed by his experiences and apprehensions, the Spirit lifted him up, and he heard voices from above. Whilst we listen only to the voices of earth, we shall endure distress and discouragement. But if filled with the Spirit, we may hear voices which shall ravish our hearts with joy and inspire them with courage. 1. Celestial voices summon our attention away from man to God. There is a Divine side to our humanity, to our life, our work, and even our sorrows. The spirit of man is capable of apprehending the Divine, and, indeed, only in doing so does it realize the purpose of its existence. God is not far from every one of us; and he is near to all who call upon him in truth. 2. Celestial voices summon us to contemplate the majesty of the Eternal. This is their burden: "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place." How poor do earth's pleasures, and how paltry do earth's interests seem, when brought into comparison with the heavenly and eternal! The Hebrew prophets certainly enjoyed a wonderful insight into the majestic attributes of Jehovah. If we will be led by them, they will lead us into the presence, and reveal to us something of the glory, of the Lord of all. Thus may we be freed from bondage to earth's littleness; thus may we learn the true, full lessons of being. 3. Thus earthly trouble may be lost and absorbed in heavenly grandeur. The voice of the rushing, the noise of the wheels, the rustling of the wings,—these appealed to the imagination and touched the spirit of the prophet; and his trials and difficulties shrank into their proper insignificance, when he was conscious of the nearness and of the infinite superiority of the Divine. We may not always be able to reason down our difficulties, to repress our anxieties, to vanquish our temptations. But we may bring all into the presence of Divine visions and Divine voices; and they will assume their just proportions, and God will be the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, of all.—T.

Ver. 14.—*Human bitterness and Divine strength.* The Prophet Ezekiel would have been more or less than human had he not felt poignantly the painful commission with which he was entrusted. He was a patriot as well as a prophet; and his distress and trouble arose not merely from the discouragement natural to his position and service, but from his sympathy with his fellow-countrymen, his censure of their sin, his sorrow for their fate. Yet it was not the will of God that his grief should interfere with the efficiency of his ministry. And the Lord who called him to his special work chose the occasion of the prophet's depression as the occasion of his intervention upon his behalf and for his strengthening. It was when Ezekiel was in bitterness and the heat of his spirit that the hand of the Lord was strong upon him. Nor was this experience peculiar to this prophet; many have, in God's service, known Ezekiel's bitterness, and have, in the time of their bitterness, felt God's hand upon them, a hand of encouragement, of guidance, and of blessing.

I. THE NATURAL DEPRESSION OF THE DISAPPOINTED WORKER FOR GOD. The circumstances described in the context are abundantly sufficient to account for the bitterness and heat of the prophet's spirit. Every faithful servant and minister of God can enter, more or less completely, into his feelings. The conditions of labour are often discouraging and distressing.

II. THERE IS DANGER LEST THE EFFECT OF MENTAL BITTERNESS SHOULD BE THE CRIPPLING OF THE HANDS FOR EFFICIENT LABOUR. A cheerful mind contributes to efficient toil. Even if the task be difficult and painful, it will not be well performed if bitterness and heat of spirit prevail. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

III. DIVINE INTERPOSITION CAN IMPART STRENGTH, CAN ALLAY VEXATION, CAN FIT FOR SPIRITUAL MINISTRY. "The hand of the Lord," says the prophet, "was strong upon me." This metaphorical expression is full of significance. 1. Strong to *uphold*, as a father's hand sustains his child in a difficult and dangerous road. 2. Strong to *defend*, as the hand of an escort may ward off from his charge the attack of a foe. 3. Strong to *direct*, as the hand of the helmsman may steer the ship upon her course. 4. Strong to *cheer and encourage*, as the hand of the husband may grasp that of the wife, to comfort and to animate with courage, in times of common difficulty, sorrow, and distress. 5. Strong to *save*, as the hand of a deliverer may rescue a drowning form from raging waterfloods.—T.

Vers. 17—19.—*The watchman's office.* Every servant of God conceives his service in his own manner, under the special light of his own experience and character. Ezekiel evidently felt the peculiar solemnity of his position among the children of the Captivity, and evidently was consumed by a desire to discharge his difficult and painful duty with fidelity and efficiency. Hence his habit of regarding himself, as indeed the Divine Spirit prompted him to do, as a watchman set to admonish and protect the Hebrew exiles in the East. In many respects this figure sets forth the vocation of every true minister of Christ called upon to watch for souls as one who must give account unto God.

I. THE WATCHMAN'S COMMISSION. The spiritual guardian and keeper does not undertake this duty at the suggestion of his own thoughts and inclinations; he is called to it by the voice of God himself. The word of the Lord comes unto him. He is stationed where he stands by Divine authority. He has to listen for the Divine voice, to give heed to every direction, to be ready to utter such messages as he may receive from Heaven.

II. THE WATCHMAN'S DUTY. This is, generally, to testify to man according to the instructions he receives. He has to hear in order that he may speak, to take in the truth in order that he may give it forth. It is, therefore, not enough that he be attentive and intelligent; he must impart the tidings, the message, which he receives. He has a ministry, a trust, to fulfil for the benefit of his fellow-men—he has to seek to bring them into conscious relations with the Father of spirits.

III. THE WATCHMAN'S SPECIAL OFFICE FOR THE REBELLIOUS. Watching for men, the spiritual guardian is bound to remember the special character of those over whom he is placed. He is not simply an instructor entrusted with the duty of declaring truth, of inculcating lessons and precepts. He has to deal with "a rebellious house." Hence one great function of the watchman is to *warn*. Throughout this book the greatest stress is laid upon this duty. "Warn them from me!" is the admonition of God to the faithful watchman. The people are in danger from manifold temptations; and they have to be put upon their guard against the spiritual perils by which they are threatened. The wicked are to be warned, that they may repent; the righteous have to be warned, lest they fall from their righteousness.

IV. THE WATCHMAN'S RESPONSIBILITY. The office thus described is indeed an honourable one; but it is difficult and responsible. Much depends upon the way in which the duty is discharged; the safety of the people and the acceptance of the guardian are both alike at stake. 1. The watchman's fidelity will be rewarded. If he fulfil his duty, he will deliver his soul, he will be approved and recompensed, promoted and honoured. 2. The watchman's unfaithfulness will be punished. If he do not his duty, others will suffer, but he himself will not escape just retribution. The blood of the lost will be required at his hand.

APPLICATION. 1. Here is a lesson for those who are appointed to watch for souls. Their ears must be open to receive the Word of the Lord; their lips must be open to speak that Word. 2. Here is a lesson for those who enjoy the benefit of spiritual ministrations. It is not only an awful and responsible duty to watch; it is an awful and responsible privilege to listen to the watchman's warning. If the preacher is accountable for his utterances, the hearer is accountable for the spirit in which he receives those utterances. Take heed *what*, and *how*, you hear!—T.

Vers. 26, 27.—*Dumbness and speech.* The wise man has said, "There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." There are those who speak when they would do well to hold their peace; there are those who are speechless when it becomes them to utter their mind with boldness. A prophet is emphatically one who speaks for God; a silent prophet is a paradox. Yet, as Ezekiel was, of all his order, the one whose ministry was especially a ministry of symbol, it is only in harmony with his peculiar vocation that, for a time and for a purpose, he should be as one dumb. On the other hand, the abundance of his utterances is apparent from the length to which the book of his prophecies extends. There were reasons for both his dumbness and his speech.

I. THE TESTIMONY OF SILENCE. That God should enjoin one of his own prophets to silence is certainly a very remarkable fact, and one that needs explanation. 1. It is evidence of Israel's unbelief and inattention. When the people refused to hear, there was a solemn dignity in the refusal of the prophet any longer to speak. 2. It is in rebuke of Israel's attempt to silence the Lord's messenger. The people would have their monitor hold his peace; and God gave them their will. The oracle was dumb. 3. The silencing of the prophet was judicial. Punishment is a reality; and severe indeed is the penalty inflicted upon that nation in which the voice of God's prophets is silenced. The effects of such sin recoil upon the sinners' heads. 4. Such silencing was suggestive. It offered opportunity for reflection; it called for consideration regarding the future; it may well have appeared to the thoughtful premonitory of worse calamities to follow.

II. THE TESTIMONY OF SPEECH. 1. This is the result of Divine preparation: "When I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth." The same power which, at one time and for one purpose, closes the lips, at another time and for another purpose, opens them. So long as God withholds the message, the prophet is silenced; no sooner is the message conveyed to the prophet than he is empowered to utter it. 2. This is in fulfilment of a Divine commission: "Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God." A command like this may well unseal the lips. The man who is convinced that he is justified in thus prefacing his utterances may well speak, whether his message be palatable or unpalatable, whether it bring the messenger praise or blame from his fellow-men. 3. This is accompanied by Divine authority: "He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear." It is for the people's own advantage that the prophet witnesses; if he warns, it is that they may escape threatened danger; if he promises, it is that they may obtain blessings; if he commands, it is that they may obey, and secure the rewards of obedience. Accordingly, it is for the people to consult their own highest interests. But in any case they are subject to Divine authority; from that, and all that it involves, there is no escape.

APPLICATION. 1. God has different ways of dealing with men; sometimes not only different, but apparently opposite ways, as in the case before us. And indeed, one man may be reached and benefited by speech; another man, by silence. 2. In whatever way God deals with us, we are equally and inevitably responsible. It is indeed in our power to hear or to forbear, *i.e.* to obey or to disobey. But to every man faith and obedience bring blessing; and moreover (which is still more important), they are in themselves right and becoming. Ours is the privilege; ours is the accountability for its proper use.—T.

Vers. 4—14.—*Ambassadorship.* God makes unusual manifestations of his glory to men, to qualify them for extraordinary service. The opened heavens and the voice of Divine approbation, on the occasion of Jesus' baptism, were a preparation for the desert conflict. The transfiguration of our Lord on the mount was designed to qualify the disciples for arduous spiritual toil. Ezekiel found it right pleasant to receive higher revelations of God's Person and God's will, but irksome to the flesh to convey that will to his brethren.

I. THE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY. The splendid manifestation of God, recorded in the first chapter, was intended to prepare and fortify Ezekiel for this difficult undertaking. The God of heaven, who dwelt amid such splendours, and who had such a magnificent retinue, condescended to employ this timid "son of man" as his ambassador. Whenever an envoy has been sent by his monarch to a foreign court, on a momentous errand, he has been sustained by the consciousness that he represented, in his weak person, the honour of the monarch and the strength of the whole empire. So Ezekiel had been admitted to the court of the celestial King, and was honoured to bear the commands of the eternal God. No other authority could be compared with this. Having revealed to his ecstatic vision the glories of the heavenly King, the Sovereign's voice broke graciously on the servant's ear, "Go, get thee unto the house of Israel."

II. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MESSAGE. "Speak with *my* words." The first task the prophet had to perform was with himself. It was a necessity that he should repress and subject self. He must overbear his timidity. He must mortify his pride. He must forego personal tastes and predilections. *This* done, his task was simple. He was to be spokesman for God. He was released from the perplexity of inventing suasive arguments or selecting fitting words. All the material for reproof, expostulation, counsel, appeal, was furnished by God himself. On every occasion the prophet was required to speak in the name of the Sovereign, and to use this formula, "Thus saith Jehovah."

III. THE RESISTANCE ANTICIPATED. At first sight, it would seem as if the prophet's mission were an easy one. To convey a further disclosure of God's will to his own people would surely be a most welcome thing. If they had accorded to Moses almost reverential honour, will they not display a similar disposition to another prophet? Moreover, the people were now in the extremity of trouble—in the depths of affliction: would they not the more readily hear a message from their God? A singular doom was awaiting such bright hopes. Surface prospects were indeed favourable, but the most formidable opposition was thinly veiled. No foe on earth is so terrible to face as a depraved human will. As metals, that have been repeatedly heated and cooled, cannot easily be made ductile; so, under much gracious treatment, the heart of Israel had become hopelessly hardened. It is an unalterable law of Heaven, that kindness abused becomes the heaviest curse. Yet no measure of opposition was to deter the prophet in fulfilling his duty, or he, too, would experience the curse of disobedience. Though he was forewarned how resistant would be his auditors, his commission was unmodified, his task unchanged. If no advantage should accrue to the house of Israel, large advantage would accrue to the prophet, as the result of his fidelity—large advantage would result to later generations. Difficulty is not the measure of duty. Service for God bears fruit in unexpected directions.

IV. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT IS PROVIDED BY GOD. In our warfare for God we may find encouragement in the superior resources of our Master against all assailants. Truth is mightier than error all the world over. Righteousness is mightier than wickedness. We have an ally in the *conscience* of our foe, if all his *passions* be against us. Best encouragement of all, God's strength is mightier, more durable, than the might of allied humanity. The conflict may be long, but final conquest is sure. Special equipment, too, is provided for special difficulties. "To the froward God will show himself froward." If his enemies show a brazen face, God will give his servants a forehead of steel. If they mail themselves with flints, God will provide his defenders with breastplates of adamant. "My grace is sufficient for thee;" "As thy day thy strength."

V. THE TRUE PROPHET IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF GOD'S UNIVERSAL ARMY. He does not labour alone, nor contend alone. The Spirit of God is upon him—fortifies him on every side. Angels rejoice in the appointment of human ambassadors. The great forces of the universe work along with the servant of God. The living creatures co-operate with God's soldiery. As we go forth to the battle with sin, we may hear behind us the rustling of the heavenly wings, and the music of the heavenly wheels, and the chorus of sympathizing saints, "Be ye faithful unto death." The battle is not *ours*, but *God's*. The cause with which we are identified is most honourable. Our Master is the King of heaven. We act in alliance with the noblest spirits in the universe. Complete triumph is predestined.—D.

Vers. 15—21.—*Responsibility.* It is a serious thing to be responsible for our own conduct; it is (if possible) yet more serious to have responsibility for others. The two things are inseparably intertwined.

I. RESPONSIBILITY SPRINGS FROM NATURAL RELATIONSHIP. Relationships are of all kinds—near and remote. No man is completely detached from others. *His* life penetrates other lives. A father is responsible for his children. Brothers are responsible for sisters, and *vice versâ*. It was not until the demon of murderous hate had strangled the natural instinct of brotherhood, that the sullen miscreant asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

II. RESPONSIBILITY SPRINGS FROM OFFICIAL POSITION. The eternal God had exalted Ezekiel to a position of honour in his kingdom; and high rank is another name for high responsibility. To make this clear to his servant, God employed comparison, analogy, forcible illustration. On the city watchman hung the fate of the city—the lives of fellow-citizens. He was exempted from other duties that he might the better discharge *this*. For many reasons, some manifest, some hidden, God appoints men, not angels, to be the exponents of his will to men. Faithful service will be richly rewarded; the *loss* of such rewards is a heavy penalty. But responsibility, if abused, bears a prolific harvest of disasters.

III. Responsibility springs from superior knowledge. If knowledge is power, knowledge is responsibility also. The light of wisdom or of science is entrusted to us that it may be *diffused*. In proportion to the practical value of the knowledge is the responsible duty to propagate it. Hence the special insight into man's fallen state, the subtlety of temptation, and the overwhelming results of impenitence—in brief, the special knowledge of God's intention with respect to guilty men—this entails on every prophet and preacher an imponderable responsibility to be faithful. Men might have been saved had they known both the generous and the judicial purposes of God; *we* knew and might have instructed them.

IV. Responsibility springs from possible influence. To the utmost extent that we can touch the springs of motive and of action in our fellow-men are we responsible for them. Our responsibility does not begin and end with the message we deliver. We are to *warn* men. This mystic influence we possess over others is reflected from every smile and tone and feature. Hence temper, motive, fervour, earnestness, are elements of our power. We warn others by our own abstinence from sin, by our self-denials, our heavenly-mindedness, our fruitful goodness, our pious walk and converse. Responsibility ends only when we have exhausted every method to draw men heavenward.

V. Responsibility springs from the known results of neglected trust. The God who has placed his servants in responsible positions has deigned to inform them what shall be the effects of neglect and cowardice. To the unwarned wicked the effect shall be destruction: "They shall surely die." To the unfaithful watchman the effect shall be dishonour and loss: "The blood of the unwarned shall be required at his hand." The wicked *might* have died, though warned; but he might have repented and lived. A diseased man *may* die, although the remedy be applied; but if the known remedy be withheld, the blame of that death will fall on the slothful attendant. God has not seen it to be wise or fitting to make provision against unfaithfulness in his prophets. If they fail in the discharge of their momentous functions, no other agency will supply the room. The impenitent (who have no claim on God for any remedial measures) will, in such a case, die in their iniquity. For every position of influence, or honour, or usefulness we hold, "we must give account of ourselves before God."—D.

Vers. 22—27.—*The silenced prophet, a calamity.* The apparent success of wickedness is a seed of retribution. The people do not wish to hear, therefore their ears shall be hardened. They gnash their teeth on God's prophet, therefore God will remove him into a corner.

I. Seclusion from men brings nearer access to God. Such experience our Lord himself passed through. "I shall be left alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." "Arise, and go forth into the plain," said God to Ezekiel, "and I will there talk with thee." It is painful to be hindered and repulsed on a mission of mercy; but the servant of God may remember that the opposition is not to him, but to his Master. We naturally love society; we love success; we love to feel that our influence is moving men in the right direction. Resolute and persistent opposition is painful; but the friendship of God compensates for a thousand disappointments. If he smiles, it matters little who may frown.

II. The opposition of men brings all God's host to the prophet's side. The glorious vision which Ezekiel had seen on the banks of the Chebar was repeated in the plain. Representatives of all the living forces of heaven appeared again as the prophet's allies. In such a cause, and with such allied powers, triumph *must* eventually ensue. Though repelled, the prophet is not defeated; "Though cast down, not destroyed." If he pleased, God could have secured outward and apparent success for his messenger. He could have smitten with sudden death the more rebellious, and made the calamity an instrument for impressing and silencing others. But his wisdom preferred another course. "His thoughts are not our thoughts." Ezekiel very likely required yet further training for his work. We see not the scope and grandeur of Jehovah's plans at present; but by-and-by we shall be able to say, "He hath done all things well."

III. THE DEAFNESS OF MEN CURTAILS THE REVELATION FROM GOD. Men's pride usually becomes their punishment. They scourge themselves with their own sins. If they make themselves deaf, God will make his servant dumb. The time will come when they shall earnestly desire to hear some message from the Lord, but they shall desire in vain. They may attempt to force the prophet into speech, but they will attempt in vain. Saul, the first King of Israel, was disobedient to the heavenly voice; yet when he was entangled in thick dangers, he cried to God, but God answered not, neither by prophet, nor by vision, nor by Urim or Thummim. "Because I called, and ye refused . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh." Reproof was the kindest message the people could have from God, yet they understood it not. The hardened soil must be broken up by the plough before it is of any use to cast in the seed. The diseased man needs medicine, not sweetmeats. And when, at times, God does give his prophets a word to utter, it is only the word of reproof again. He will bring their self-will and pride again to remembrance. The pearls of his gospel he casts not before swine.—D.

Vers. 4—7.—*The awful consequences of neglecting the Word of the Lord.* "And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel," etc. Here is a comparison between two possible spheres of prophetic service—between the Israelites and the heathen (ver. 5); between the one house of Israel and many heathen peoples (ver. 6). 1. *Both these spheres of service would have presented difficulties in the way of the fulfilment of the prophet's mission.* In the case of the heathen nation or nations there would have been the linguistical difficulty. Ezekiel would not have understood their speech; they would not have understood his. European missionaries find this, and have to spend no inconsiderable time in acquiring the language of those to whom they are sent, before they can begin their great work. In the case of the house of Israel the difficulty was in their moral condition. It was not that the prophet's speech was unintelligible unto them, but that their hearts were hardened against the Word of the Lord. 2. *The linguistical hindrance to the success of the prophet's mission was far less serious than the moral.* Time and patient application would enable him to surmount the former; but what human skill or assiduity can overcome the strong prejudice or moral obstinacy of the heart? 3. *The moral hindrance to the success of the prophet's mission is sometimes humanly insuperable.* (Ver. 7.) What is the reason of this, that the untaught heathen would have attended unto the prophet, while the privileged Israelites would not hearken unto him?

I. THE FAMILIARITY OF THE ISRAELITES WITH THE TRUTHS PUBLISHED BY THE PROPHET HAD DEPRIVED THOSE TRUTHS OF THE INTEREST WHICH ARISES FROM NOVELTY. The unfamiliar and the new have great attractions for many minds (cf. Acts xvii. 19—21). Ezekiel had no new fundamental truths to make known unto the house of Israel. What Moses and other prophets had taught he had to enforce and apply to their present circumstances. With the general principles of his teaching they were well acquainted. His message had no interest to them. But to the heathen his message would have been fresh and charged with interest. It would have awakened inquiry, etc. And alas! how many in Christian congregations to-day are so familiar with the gospel of Jesus Christ that they heed it not! Things which, compared with it, are the trifles of an hour, secure their eager attention, while it is treated as an unimportant and unprofitable thing.

II. THE LONG INDIFFERENCE OF THE ISRAELITES TO THE TRUTHS PUBLISHED BY THE PROPHET HAD RENDERED THEM INSENSIBLE TO THE POWER OF THOSE TRUTHS. They had heard them without heeding them, until heedlessness had become habitual in relation to them. They had refused to recognize their importance so long that now they seemed to them to have no importance. But the heathen would not have been thus indifferent to these truths. For them they would have had, not only the interest of novelty, but the influence arising from their practical relation to their hearts and lives. Is it not to be feared that in Christian countries at present there are many who, like the house of Israel, have so long been indifferent to "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" that now it is natural to them not to feel any personal concern in it? The offer which is repeatedly disregarded is ere long unnoticed. Warnings which are frequently unheeded at length cease to be heard.

III. The practical opposition of the Israelites to the truths published by the prophet had hardened their hearts against those truths. They had so long refused to do the will of God that they had become insensible to the power of his Word. They were "impudent and hard-hearted"—"stiff of forehead and hard of heart." They would not hear the Word of the Lord. But the heathen would have heard it if that Word had been sent unto them; for they had not hardened themselves against it. They were accessible to its influence, etc. This solemn truth receives confirmation from other portions of Scripture. While the house of Israel rejected their prophets, the heathen of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah. Our Lord also confirms this truth in solemn words (Matt. viii. 10—12; xi. 20—24; xii. 38—42). The history of modern missions supplies illustrations of the power of the gospel of Christ to interest and astonish, to attract and fascinate, to convince and convert, heathen peoples. Yet in this highly favoured land there are millions who are unmoved by that gospel. And of these many, many, we fear, have hardened themselves against the will and Word of God. They who persist in so doing become "past feeling." Moral power fails to impress them. They are "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." When holy authority has no force for men, and Divine threatenings no awakening power, and truth and righteousness no sacred majesty, and death and eternity no solemnity, and the deepest, tenderest love no spell upon the heart,—when men are indifferent to these, harden themselves against these, what moral influences of a saving character can be brought to bear upon them?

Conclusion. 1. *If the heathen would have heard the Word of the Lord, how is it that the prophet was not sent unto them?* Our answer must be that of our Lord when considering a similar question: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," etc. (Matt. xi. 25, 26). And it is important to remember that the heathen will be judged, not according to the light which they had not, but according to that which they had. 2. *If the heathen are thus disposed to hear the Word of the Lord, the gospel will most surely be published unto them.* (Mark xvi. 15; Rev. xiv. 6, 7.) 3. But the chief voice of our subject is that of *solemn admonition to all unto whom the gospel is preached.* "Take heed how ye hear." "Despise not prophesyings." Beware of hearing the Word of the Lord with indifference; for indifference may grow into obduracy of heart such as no moral force can penetrate.—W. J.

Vers. 16—21.—*The prophet a watchman.* "And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the Word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel," etc. Let us notice—

I. The character in which the prophet of the Lord is here represented. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel." 1. *The appointment of a watchman implies the peril of the Church.* Watchmen in ancient times were posted on the walls or in the towers of cities in order that they might watch for the appearance or approach of an enemy, and give instant warning of the same. The house of Israel was exposed to dangers and enemies, or it would not have needed a watchman. And the Church of Christ to-day is opposed by "the gates of hell" (Matt. xvi. 18), by evil powers in the world, and by evil persons and erroneous teachings within itself (Acts xx. 29, 30). 2. *The appointment of watchmen in the Church is the prerogative of God.* "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman," etc. No man may constitute himself a watchman, and no Church may appoint a man to this office apart from the call of the Lord thereto. Christian ministers are called of God (cf. Heb. v. 4).

II. The duty of the prophet as a watchman. His business was "to take notice, and to give notice." 1. *To watch.* "Hear the word at my mouth." It is a peculiarity of these watchmen that they have not to look around to obtain intelligence, but to look up. Their eyes and ears must be directed towards the Lord. They must receive their message from him, and then proclaim it unto men. And the Christian prophet must speak the Word of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must "hear him" (Matt. xvii. 5); we must preach him (2 Cor. iv. 5). This part of a watchman's duty demands vigilance. Slothfulness and inattention may prove disastrous both to his charge and to himself. His observant faculties must be in active exercise. 2. *To warn.* "And give them warning from me." Ezekiel was to publish to the house of Israel what he heard from the Lord, and to publish it in his Name. The Christian preacher must warn and encourage, exhort and rebuke, in the Name of his Master, the Christ. He must receive from him; he must testify for him (cf. Matt. x. 40; Luke x. 16).

III. THE CHARACTERS UNTO WHOM THE WATCHMAN MUST ADDRESS HIMSELF. He must warn both the righteous and the wicked (vers. 18—21). But four types of character are adduced here. 1. *The wicked man who has not been warned by the watchman, and dies because of his iniquity.* (Ver. 18.) God declares that "the wages of sin is death;" that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." And though this wicked man was not warned by the watchman, yet he was warned by his own conscience, and by voices of Divine providence, and by the sacred Scriptures. "Where the public ministry does not do its duty, Holy Scripture is still at hand, and it is each one's fault if he be not called to repentance by the voice of this" (Hengstenberg). 2. *The wicked man who has been warned by the watchman, but still persists in sin, and dies because of his iniquity.* (Ver. 19.) His guilt is greater, and his punishment will be more severe, by reason of the warnings which he has despised. 3. *The sometime outwardly righteous man, who has become a worker of iniquity, and has not been warned by the watchman, and dies because of his sin.* (Ver. 20.) This verse calls for some remarks by way of exposition. (1) That in the providence of God the characters of men are tested. The words, "I lay a stumbling-block before him," point to this. The expression signifies to subject one to trial by exposing him to difficulties and dangers, as in Jer. vi. 21. "God tempts no man in order to his destruction, but in the course of his providence he permits men to be tried in order that their faith may be approved, and in this trial some who seem to be righteous fall" (Dr. Currey). (2) That some characters fail beneath this test. Where the righteousness is only external, it is unable to endure the trial. But "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" will not be injured by the trial. (3) That when one who has done righteous acts fails under trial and becomes a worker of iniquity, he forfeits the reward of those righteous acts, and, if he persist in sin, he will die by reason thereof. "He shall die because of his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered." To obtain the reward of good works perseverance therein even to the end is necessary (cf. Heb. vi. 10—12; 2 John 8; Rev. iii. 11). 4. *The righteous man who has been warned by the watchman, and, persevering in his righteousness, lives.* (Ver. 21.) The sincerely righteous need warning, exhortation, and counsel, and are likely to profit by them.

IV. THE DIFFERENT RESULTS OF THE WATCHMAN'S MINISTRY. 1. *As regards his hearers.* (1) Some would not heed his warnings. In the examples given in the text there is a majority of this class. The result to them would be greater guilt and severer condemnation. How many, alas! treat the warnings of the Christian watchman in a similar manner! They hear them, but practically despise them. (2) Some would heed his warnings, and their salvation would be furthered by so doing. An example of this is given in ver. 21. And others, through him, might be led to turn from their iniquity, and live. Unspeakably blessed are such results. 2. *As regards himself.* (1) If the watchman should be unfaithful his guilt would be terrible. "His blood will I require at thine hand" (vers. 18, 20; cf. Gen. ix. 5; xlii. 22). "It is the life," says Schröder, "which is in the blood, of those in Israel which is entrusted to the prophet as a watchman. For this Jehovah, the Supreme Proprietor, demands a reckoning. The prophet who forgets his duty, which he owes to the unrighteous in God's stead, becomes a manslaughterer, a murderer of that man, and is regarded as such by God;" and as a murderer, not of the body, but of the inestimably precious soul. The thought of such guilt is overwhelmingly dreadful. How awful is the responsibility of the Lord's watchmen! "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2) If the watchman is faithful, though unsuccessful, he would be clear from guilt, and be saved himself (cf. Acts xviii. 6; xx. 26, 27). (3) If the watchman is faithful and successful, great would be his joy and great his reward, as in the case stated in ver. 21.

And in the case which is not mentioned here, but is yet among the possible results of his work, viz. that the wicked should believe his message, and turn unto the Lord. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him," etc. (Jas. v. 19, 20). Who can estimate the blessedness of a result like this?

CONCLUSION. Our subject presents: 1. *The strongest reasons for fidelity on the part of the ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.* 2. *The strongest reasons why the Church of Jesus Christ should constantly aid his ministers by earnest prayers on their behalf.* (Cf. Eph. vi. 18—20; Col. iv. 3, 4; 2 Thess. iii. 1, 2.)—W. J.

Vers. 22, 23.—*God communicating with man.* "And the hand of the Lord was there upon me; and he said unto me, Arise," etc. The text presents for our notice—

I. THE GRACIOUS PREPARATION OF MAN FOR THE RECEPTION OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. "And the hand of the Lord was there upon me." (We have already briefly noticed the significance of this expression in dealing with ch. i. 3.) Ezekiel seems to have been grieved and saddened in spirit (vers. 14, 15). Such depression unfitted him for receiving communications from God. Therefore "the hand of the Lord," the power of the Lord, came upon him to quicken him for the reception of the revelation of his will. God prepares his servants for his service. He qualifies and enables them to sustain exalted privileges, to perform arduous duties, to bear severe trials.

II. AN IMPORTANT CONDITION, FOR MAN, OF THE RECEPTION OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. "Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with thee." Ezekiel is thus commanded to depart from Tel-Abib and his fellow-captives, and to go, not to the "plain extending to the river, but to a certain valley between the mountain-walls there"—for such is the signification of the word which is translated "plain" in the Authorized Version. Retirement was a condition of communion and communication with God. If the prophet would hear his voice and behold his glory, he must go into the lonely valley. "God makes himself known to the mind only when it has been entirely withdrawn from worldly influences. We must be in the valley; but we may be in the bustling town, and yet in the valley" (Hengstenberg). (We have spoken of solitude and quiet as favouring Divine communications in our remarks on ch. i. 1: "By the river of Chebar.")

III. THE CONDESCENSION OF GOD IN THE BESTOWMENT UPON MAN OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. With Ezekiel the Lord communicated in two ways. 1. *By speech.* "I will there talk with thee." God made known his will to his servant. Spiritually, he thus communicates with his people still. In infinite condescension, "the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, and who dwells in the high and holy place," also makes his abode in the hearts of his people (Isa. lvii. 15; John xiv. 23). They have intimate fellowship with him (1 John i. 3). He will even visit them as their Guest, and sup with them (Rev. iii. 20). They are blessedly conscious of his presence with them. By his Spirit he speaks unto them. 2. *By vision.* "Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and, behold, the glory of the Lord stood there," etc. The glory of the Lord which the prophet beheld was like that which he saw before, and which he mentions in ch. i. 28. (We have already remarked on the granting of Divine visions to man, on ch. i. 1: "I saw visions of God.") And in our own times God opens the spiritual eyes of man, and grants unto him spiritual visions. Visions of truth and purity and beauty he exhibits to his people. He even reveals himself unto them. Our Lord promised to manifest himself unto his loving and obedient disciples (John xiv. 21). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

IV. THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT UPON MAN OF DIVINE COMMUNICATIONS. "And I fell on my face." 1. *The sight of such glory humbles man with the sense of his own immeasurable inferiority.* 2. *The sight of such glory overwhelms man by quickening his consciousness of sin into greater activity.* 3. *Such humiliation is a condition of hearing the voice of God.*[1]—W. J.

Vers. 24—27.—*The temporary suspension of the active ministry of the prophet.* "Then the Spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet," etc. Seclusion and silence were enjoined upon Ezekiel for a time. Our text teaches that the temp suspension of his active ministry—

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[1] These three points are stated at greater length in our homily on ch. i. 28—ii.

I. WAS COMMANDED BY THE LORD. "Then the Spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house" (cf. ch. ii. 2). One would have been inclined to conclude that, when he was revived by the Spirit, the prophet would have been ordered to enter upon active service. But he was commanded to seclude himself within his house. This seclusion was probably intended as: 1. *A season of meditation for the prophet.* Such seasons are requisite for those whose work for God is public and arduous; and in his providence God so orders their lives that such seasons are attainable by them; *e.g.* Moses in the desert of Midian (Exod. iii. 1); St. Paul in Arabia (Gal. i. 17); Martin Luther in the monastery of Erfurt, and in the castle of Wartburg. 2. *As a silent admonition to the people.* God would instruct them by symbol, that from a rebellious people the prophetic presence and voice may be withdrawn. If men will not heed the reproofs of his servants, the reprover shall be silent towards them (ver. 26).

II. WAS OCCASIONED BY THE OBSTINACY OF THE PEOPLE IN WICKEDNESS. "But thou, O son of man, behold, they shall put bands upon thee, and shall bind thee with them, and thou shalt not go out among them." This verse is a difficult one, and we cannot assert dogmatically what it means; but it seems to us that it should be taken metaphorically, and that it symbolizes the truth that the persistent sins of the people occasioned the seclusion and silence of the prophet. Dr. Fairbairn thus paraphrases the verse under consideration: "Their obstinate and wayward disposition shall be felt upon thy spirit like restraining fetters, repressing the energies of thy soul in its spiritual labours, so that thou shalt need to look for thy encouragement elsewhere than in fellowship with them. The imposition of bands must be understood spiritually, of the damping effect to be produced upon his soul by the conduct of the people. It is a marked specimen of the strong idealism of our prophet, which clothes everything it handles with the distinctness of flesh and blood." The persistent rebelliousness of the people occasioned the temporary suspension of the active work of the prophet. The unbelief of our Lord's own countrymen was as bands upon him, restraining the exercise of his benevolent power. "And he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." Obstinacy in wickedness deprives man of the most precious spiritual possessions.

III. WAS TO BE RIGIDLY ENFORCED. "And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth, that thou shalt be dumb, and shalt not be to them a reprover: for they are a rebellious house." This is to be taken metaphorically. "Because the people would silence the prophet, God, to punish them, will close his mouth." During the time of the suspension of his prophetic activity he would be as silent to them as a dumb man. When the Lord determines to deprive a people of any blessing which they have despised or persistently disregarded, his determination will certainly be enforced.

IV. WAS TO BE ONLY TEMPORARY. "But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God," etc. The withdrawal of the messenger of the Lord was not to be permanent. The prophet would speak again when God willed him to do so. When his seclusion and silence had produced their effect, he must go forth and proclaim the word of the Lord. The following observations are suggested by this verse: 1. *The prophet is empowered for his work by the Lord.* "When I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth." Ezekiel received his message from the Lord, and was emboldened by him to deliver it. 2. *The prophet is authorized in his work by the Lord.* "Thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God." Both the silence and the speech of Ezekiel were expressly ordered by God. In both he was under the control of his Divine Master, remaining silent when so directed by him, and proclaiming his word when commanded and enabled by him to do so. "This represents forcibly the authoritative character and Divine origin of the utterances of the Hebrew prophets." 3. *The prophet's great concern in his work should be to be faithful to the Lord.* "Thus saith the Lord God; He that heareth, let him hear; and he that forbeareth, let him forbear: for they are a rebellious house." Ezekiel was not responsible for the success of his work with the people. But fidelity in executing the commissions which he received from his great Master was required of him. For this he was responsible. And still "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. iv. 2).

Conclusion. Our subject addresses to us solemn admonition as to our treatment of the Word of the Lord. If we persistently despise or disregard that Word, he may withdraw it from us, or place us beyond the sphere of the ministry thereof. Neglected privileges may justly and reasonably be taken away from those who have neglected them (cf. Amos viii. 4—12).—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IV.

Prior to any detailed examination of the strange series of acts recorded in this and the following chapter, we are met with the question whether they were indeed visible and outward acts, or only imagined by the prophet in a state of ecstasy and afterwards reported by him to the people. Each view has been maintained by commentators of repute. I adopt, with scarcely any hesitation, the former, and for the following reasons. (1) On the other interpretation the acts recorded were not signs to the people (ver. 3) till the prophet reported them; but the whole context shows that they were to be substitutes for spoken teaching. They belong to the period of the prophet's silence. (2) This mode of teaching, though not carried to the same extent, was part of the normal method of a prophet's work. .Zedekiah's horns of iron (1 Kings xxii. 11); Isaiah's walking "naked and barefoot" for three years (Isa. xx. 2, 3); Jeremiah's yokes of wood (Jer. xxvii. 2), probably even the latter prophet's journey to the Euphrates (Jer. xiii. 4); and Hosea's marriage with a harlot (Hos. i.—iii.), were all outward objective facts. We are only disposed to take a different view of Ezekiel's acts because they are more startling and repulsive; but to adopt a non-natural interpretation on this *à priori* ground of feeling is not the act of an honest interpreter. We have to admit that outwardly the life of the prophets of Israel might present analogies to the phenomena of other religions or other times. The acts of Ezekiel may find a parallel in those of Simeon Stylites or George Fox; of Jesus the son of Ananus, who for seven years and five months walked to and fro in Jerusalem, uttering his woes against the city and the holy house (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' vi. 6. 3); of Solomon Eagle, as he, in like manner, walked through the streets of London during the great Plague (Defoe, 'Hist. of the Plague,' p. 519, edit. 1869).

Ver. 1.—**The first sign in this method of** unspoken prophecy was to indicate to the exiles of Tel-Abib that which they were unwilling to believe. The day of uncertain hopes and fears, of delusive dreams and promises (Jer. xxvii. 16; xxviii. 1—3; xxix. 21), was nearly over. The siege of Jerusalem. in spite of Zedekiah's Egyptian alliance, was a thing decreed. Four years before it came—we are now between the fourth month of the fifth year (ch. i. 2) and the sixth month of the sixth year (ch. viii. 1) of Zedekiah, and the siege began in the ninth year (2 Kings xxv. 1)—Ezekiel, on the *segnius irritant* principle, brought it, as here narrated, before the eyes of the exiles. That he did so implies a certain artistic culture, in possessing which he stands alone, so far as we know, among the prophets of Israel, and to which his residence in the land of the Chaldees may have contributed. He takes a tile, or tablet of baked clay, such as were used in Babylon and Assyria for private contracts, historical inscriptions, astronomical observations (Pliny, 'Hist. Nat.,' vii. 57), and the like, which were, in fact, the books of that place and time, and of which whole libraries have been brought to light in recent excavations (Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' ch. xxii.), and engraves upon it the outlines of "*a* city" (Revised Version), in which the exiles would at once recognize the city of their fathers, the towers which they had once counted (Isa. xxxiii. 18; Ps. xlviii. 12), the temple which had been their glory and their joy. Bricks with such scenes on them were found among the ruins of Nimroud, now in the British Museum (Layard, *ut supra*, ch. vii. p. 167). It is not difficult to picture to ourselves the wondering curiosity with which Ezekiel's neighbours would watch the strange proceeding. In this case the sign would be more impressive than any spoken utterance.

Ver. 2.—Lay siege against it, etc. The wonder would increase as the spectators looked on what followed. Either tracing the scene on the tablet, or, more probably, as ver. 3 seems to indicate, constructing a model of the scene, the prophet brings before their eyes all the familiar details of a siege, such as we see on numerous Assyrian bas-reliefs; such also as the narratives of the Old Testament bring before us. There are (1) the forts (as in 2 Kings xxv. 1;

Jer. lii. 4; ch. xvii. 17; xxi. 22; xxvi. 8), or, perhaps, *the wall of circumvallation*, which the besiegers erected that they might carry on their operations in safety; (2) then the mount, or mound (the English of the Authorized Version does not distinguish between the two) of earth from which they plied the bows or catapults (Jer. vi. 6; xxxii. 24; xxxiii. 4; Ezekiel, *ut supra*); (3) the camps (plural in the Hebrew and Revised Version), or *encampments*, in which they were stationed in various positions round the city; (4) the battering-rams. Here the history both of the word and the thing has a special interest. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word is "lamb" (as in Deut. xxxii. 14; 1 Sam. xv. 9, *et al.*, Revised Version), or, better, "full-grown wethers or rams" (Fürst). Like the Greek *κρίος* (Xen., 'Cyrop.,' vii. 4. 1; 2 Macc. xii. 15), and the Latin *aries* (Livy, xxi. 12; xxxi. 32, *et al.*), it was transferred to the engine which was used to "butt," like a ram, against the walls of a besieged city, and which, in Roman warfare, commonly terminated in a ram's head in bronze or iron. Ezekiel is the only Old Testament writer who, here and in ch. xxi. 22, uses the word, for which the LXX. gives *βελοστάσεις*, and the Vulgate *arietes*. The margin of the Authorized Version in both places gives "chief leaders," taking "rams" in another figurative sense; but, in the face of the LXX. and Vulgate, there is no reason for accepting this. Battering-rams frequently appear in Assyrian bas-reliefs of a much earlier date than Ezekiel's time, at Nimroud (Vaux, 'Nineveh and Persepolis,' p. 456), Konyunyik (Layard, 'Nineveh and Babylon,' p. 149), and elsewhere. They were hung by chains near the bottom of the besiegers' towers, and were propelled against the walls.

Ver. 3.—An iron pan. The word is used in Lev. ii. 5; vi. 21, *et al.*, for a flat or shallow vessel in which cakes were baked or fried. Such a pan, like the Scotch "girdle," or our "gridiron," may well have formed part of the furniture of the prophet's house when it was taken for this strange use. It was to represent the kind of shield or fence set up on the ground, from behind which the besiegers discharged their arrows. Such shields are seen, like the battering-rams, in Assyrian bas-reliefs (Layard, 'Nineveh,' etc., ii. 345). Other interpretations, which see in it the symbol of the circumvallation of the city, or of the impenetrable barrier which the sins of the people had set up between themselves and Jehovah, or of the prophet himself as strong and unyielding (Jer. i. 18), do not commend themselves. The flat plate did not go round the city, and the spiritual meaning is out of harmony with the context. **This shall be a sign, etc.** (comp. like forms in ch. xii. 6, 11; xxiv. 24, 27). The exiles of Tel-Abib, who were the only spectators of the prophet's acts, are taken as representatives of "the house of Israel," that phrase being commonly used by Ezekiel, unless, as in vers. 5, 6, and ch. xxxvii. 16, there is a special reason for noting a distinction for Judah as representing the whole nation.

Ver. 4.—Lie thou also upon thy left side, etc. We find the explanation of the attitude in ch. xvi. 46. Samaria was on the "left hand," *i.e.* to the north, as a man looked to the east. So the same word *yamin* is both "the south" (1 Sam. xxiii. 19, 24; Ps. lxxxiv. 12) and "the right hand." Here, accordingly, the "house of Israel" is taken in its specific sense, as the northern kingdom as distinguished from the "house of Judah" in ver. 6. **Thou shalt bear their iniquity;** *i.e.*, as in all similar passages (Exod. xxviii. 43; Lev. v. 17; vii. 18; Numb. xviii. 1, *et al.*), the punishment of their iniquity. The words so taken will help us to understand the numerical symbolism of the words that followed. The prophet was by this act to identify himself with both divisions of the nation, by representing in this strange form at once the severity and the limits of their punishment. I adopt, without any hesitation, the view that we have here the record of a fact, and not of a vision narrated. The object of the act was to startle men and make them wonder. As week after week went on this, *exceptis excipiendis*, was to be Ezekiel's permanent attitude, as of one crushed to the very ground, prostrate under the burden thus laid upon him, as impersonating his people.

Ver. 5.—Three hundred and ninety days, etc. The days, as stated in ver. 6, stand for years according to the symbolism (with which Ezekiel was probably acquainted) of Numb. xiv. 34. How we are to explain the precise number chosen is a problem which has much exercised the minds of interpreters. I will begin by stating what seems to me the most tenable solution. In doing this I follow Smend and Cornill in taking the LXX. as giving the original reading, and the Hebrew as a later correction, made with a purpose. (1) Jerome and Origen bear witness to the fact that most copies of the former gave 190 years, some 150. and others, agreeing with the Hebrew, 390. The first of these numbers fits in with the thought that Ezekiel's act was to represent the period of the punishment of the northern kingdom. That punishment starts from the first captivity under Pekah about B.C. 734. Reckoning from that date, the 190 years bring us to about B.C. 544. The punishment of Judah, in like manner, dates from the destruction of Jerusalem in B.C. 586, and the forty years bring us to B.C. 546, a date so near the other, that, in the round numbers which Ezekiel uses, they may be taken as practically coinciding. It was to that date that the prophet, perhaps, unacquainted with Jeremiah's seventy years (Jer. xxv. 12), with a different starting-point (B.C. 606) and *terminus* (B.C. 536), looked forward as the starting-point of the restoration of Israel. It is obvious that Ezekiel contemplated the contemporaneous restoration of Israel and Judah (ch. xvi. 53—55; xxxvii. 19—22; xlvii. 13), as indeed Isaiah also seems to do (xi. 13, 14), and Jeremiah (xxxi. 6, 12, 27). The teaching of Ezekiel's acts, then, had two distinct purposes. (*a*) It taught the certainty of the punishment. No plots, or rebellions, or alliances with Egypt, could avert the doom of exile from those who should survive the siege of Jerusalem. (*b*) It taught the exiles to accept their punishment with patience, but with hope. There was a limit, and that not very far off, which some of them might live to see, and beyond which there lay the hope of a restoration for both Israel and Judah. If that hope was not realized to the extent which Ezekiel's language implies, the same may be said of the language of Isa. xl.—lxvi., whether we refer those chapters to Isaiah himself, or to the "great unknown" who followed Ezekiel, and may have listened to his teaching. (2) Still keeping to the idea of the years of punishment, but taking the Hebrew text, the combination of 390 and 40 gives 430, and this, it is urged, was the number assigned in Exod. xii. 40 for the years of the sojourning in Egypt. Then the nation had been one, now it is divided. And the punishment of its two divisions is apportioned according to their respective guilt. For Israel, whose sins had been of a deeper dye, there was to be, as it were, another Egyptian bondage (Hos. viii. 13 and ix. 3 seem to predict a literal return to Egypt, but Hos. xi. 5 shows it to have been figurative only). For Judah there was to be another quasi-wandering in the wilderness for forty years—a period of punishment, but also of preparation for a re-entry into the land of promise (Currey, Gardiner). (3) A somewhat fanciful variation on the preceding view connects the 390 days with the forty stripes of Deut. xxv. 3, reduced by Jewish preachers to "forty stripes save one" (2 Cor. xi. 24). Thus thirty-nine were assigned to each of the ten tribes, leaving forty for Judah standing by itself. With this addition (3) merges into (2). (4) The traditional Jewish interpretation, on the other hand (Kimchi), sees in the number of the years the measure, not of the punishment, but of the guilt of Israel and Judah respectively. That of the former is measured (as in the margin of the Authorized Version) from the revolt of the ten tribes (B.C. 975) to the time at which Ezekiel received the commands with which we are now dealing (B.C. 595). This computation gives, it is true, only 380 years; but the prophet may be thought of as dealing with round numbers, the 390 being, perhaps, chosen for the reason indicated in (3), or as reckoning with a different chronology. The forty years of the guilt of Judah are, on this view, reckoned from Josiah's reformation (B.C. 624), which would bring us to B.C. 585–4. And the sin of Judah is thought of as consisting specially in its resistance to that reformation and its rapid relapse into an apostasy like that of Ahaz or Manasseh. It can hardly be said that this is a satisfactory explanation. (5) Yet another view has been suggested, *sc.* that the siege of Jerusalem lasted, in round numbers, for 430 days—a day for each year of the national guilt, as measured in the last hypothesis. Against this there is the fact that, according to the statements in 2 Kings xxv. 1—3, the siege lasted for much more than the 430 days, *sc.* for nearly a year and a half. The conclusion to which I am led, after examining the several hypotheses, is, as I have said, in favour of (1). The text of the Hebrew, as we find it, may have risen out of the fact that the ten tribes had not returned as a body, and that there was no sign of their return, when Judah returned in B.C. 536, and therefore a larger number was inserted to allow time for a more adequate interval.

Ver. 6.—**Each day for a year.** The Hebrew formula is that of iteration—"a day for a year, a day for a year." It originates, as has been said, in Numb. xiv. 34. What has been known as the year-day theory of prophetic interpretation flows naturally from it, and has been applied (1) to the "seventy weeks" of Dan. ix. 24—27, and (2) the twelve hundred and sixty and the three days and a half of Rev. xi. 3, 9.

Ver. 7.—**Thine arm shall be uncovered.** This, as in Isa. lii. 10, was the symbol of energetic action. The prophet was to be, as it were, no apathetic spectator of the siege which he was thus dramatizing, but is as the representative of the Divine commission to control and guide it. The picture of the prophet's attitude, not merely resting on his side and folding his hands, as a man at ease might do, but looking intently, with bare outstretched arm, at the scene portrayed by him, must, we may well imagine, have added to the startling effect of the whole procedure. We note the phrase, "set thy face," as specially characteristic of Ezekiel (here, and, though the Hebrew verb is not the same, ch. xiv. 8; xv. 7). The words "prophesy against it" may imply some spoken utterance of the nature of a "woe," like that of the son of Ananus (see above), but hardly, I think, a prolonged address.

Ver. 8.—**I will lay bands upon thee, etc.** The words point to the supernatural constraint which would support the prophet in a position as trying as that of an Indian yogi or a Stylite monk. He would himself be powerless to move (*exceptis excipiendis*, as before) from the prescribed position. There is, perhaps, a reference to ch. iii. 25. The people would have "put bands" upon the prophet to hinder his work; Jehovah will "put bands" upon him to help, nay, to constrain, him to finish it.

Ver. 9.—**Take thou also unto thee, etc.** The act implies, as I have said, that there were exceptions to the generally immovable attitude. The symbolism seems to have a twofold meaning. We can scarcely exclude a reference to the famine which accompanied the siege. On the other hand, one special feature of it is distinctly referred, not to the siege, but to the exile (ver. 13). Starting with the former, the prophet is told to make bread, not of wheat, the common food of the wealthier class (Deut. xxxii. 14; Ps. lxxxi. 16; cxlvii. 14; Jer. xii. 13; xli. 8), nor of barley, the chief food of the poor (ch. xiii. 19; Hos. iii. 2; John vi. 9), but of these mixed with beans (2 Sam. xvii. 28), lentils (2 Sam. xvii. 28; Gen. xxv. 34)—then, as now, largely used in Egypt and other Eastern countries—millet (the Hebrew word is not found elsewhere), and fitches, *i.e.* vetches (here also the Hebrew word is found only in this passage, that so translated in Isa. xxviii. 25—27 standing, it is said, for the seed of the black cummin). The outcome of this mixture would be a coarse, unpalatable bread, not unlike that to which the population of Paris was reduced in the siege of 1870–71. This was to be the prophet's food, as it was to be that of the people of Jerusalem during the 390 days by which that siege was symbolically, though not numerically, represented. It is not improbable, looking to the prohibition against mixtures of any kind in Deut. xxii. 9, that it would be regarded as in itself unclean.

Ver. 10.—**Thy meat, etc.**; better, *food*, here and elsewhere. Coarse as the food was, the people would have but scanty rations of it. Men were not, as usual, to measure the corn, but to weigh the bread (Lev. xxvi. 26). Taking the shekel at about 220 grains, the twenty shekels would be about 10 or 12 ounces. The common allowance in England for prison or pauper dietaries gives, I believe, from 24 to 32 ounces, besides other food. And this was to be taken, not as hunger prompted, but at the appointed hour, once a day. The whole scene of the people of the besieged city coming for their daily rations is brought vividly before us.

Ver. 11.—**The sixth part of an hin, etc.** According to the varying accounts of the "hin" given by Jewish writers, this would give from $\frac{6}{10}$ to $\frac{8}{10}$ of a pint. And this was, like the food, to be doled out once a day. Possibly "the bread of affliction and the water of affliction," in 1 Kings xxii. 27 and Isa. xxx. 20, contains a reference to the quantity as well as the quality of a prison dietary as thus described. Isaiah's words may refer to the siege of Sennacherib, as Ezekiel's do to the siege of Nebuchadnezzar.

Ver. 12.—**Thou shalt bake it with dung, etc.** The process of baking in ashes was as old as the time of Abraham (Gen. xviii. 6), and continues in Arabia and Syria to the present day. The kneaded dough was rolled into thin flat cakes, and they were placed upon, or hung over, the hot wood embers of the hearth or oven. But in a besieged city the supply of wood for fuel soon fails. The first resource is found, as still often happens in the East, in using the dried dung of camels or of cattle. Before Ezekiel's mind there came the vision of a yet more terrible necessity. That supply also might fail, and then men would be forced to use the dried contents of the "draught-houses" or cesspools of Jerusalem. They would be compelled almost literally to fulfil the taunt of Rabshakeh (Isa. xxxvi. 12). That thought, as bringing with it the ceremonial pollution of Lev. v. 3; vii. 21, was as revolting to Ezekiel as it is to us; but like Dante, in a like revolting symbolism ('Inf.,' xviii. 114), he does not shrink from naming it. It came to him, as with the authority of a Divine command, that he was even to do this, to represent the extreme horrors of the siege. And all this was to be done visibly, before the eyes of his neighbours at Tel-Abib.

Ver. 13.—**Even thus shall the children of Israel, etc.** The strange command takes a wider range. It symbolizes, not the literal horrors of the siege, but the "defiled bread" which even the exiles would be reduced to eat. So taken, the words remind us of the risk of eating unclean food, which almost inevitably attended the position of the exiles (Hos. ix. 3; Dan. i. 8), and which, it may be, Ezekiel had already felt keenly. There is obviously something more than can be explained by a reference to "the bitter bread of banishment," or to Dante's "Come sa di sale . . ." ('Par.,' xvii. 58).

Ver. 14.—**Then said I, Ah, Lord God! etc.** The formula is, curiously enough, equally characteristic of Ezekiel (ch. ix. 8; xi. 13; xx. 49) and of his teacher and contemporary (Jer. i. 6; iv. 10; xiv. 13; xxxii. 17). The Vulgate represents it by *A*, *a*, *a*. His plea, which reminds us at once of Dan. i. 8 and Acts x. 14, is that he has kept himself free from all ceremonial pollution connected with food. And is he, a priest too, to do this? That be far from him! Anything but that! The kinds of defilement of which he speaks are noted in Exod. xxii. 31; Lev. vii. 24; xi. 39, 40; xvii. 15. The "abominable things" may refer either to the unclean meats catalogued in Deut. xiv. 3—21 (as *e.g.* in Isa. lxv. 4), or as in the controversy of the apostolic age (Acts xv.; 1 Cor. viii. 1; Rev. ii. 20), to eating *any* flesh that had been offered in sacrifice to idols. The prophet's passionate appeal is characteristic of the extent to which his character had been influenced by the newly discovered Law of the Lord (2 Kings xxii.; 2 Chron. xxxiv.), *i.e.* probably by the Book of Deuteronomy.

Ver. 15.—**Lo, I have given thee, etc.** The concession mitigates the horror of the first command, though even this was probably regarded as involving some ceremonial uncleanness. It served, at any rate, to represent, in some measure, the pressure of the siege.

Ver. 16.—**The staff of bread.** The phrase occurs again in ch. v. 16; xiv. 13, and also in Lev. xxvi. 26; Ps. cv. 16. In Isa. iii. 1 the thought is the same, but the Hebrew word is different. **They shall eat bread by weight, etc.** The phrase occurs, it may be noted, in Lev. xxvi. 26, one of the verses above referred to. **The care and astonishment,** implying that the wonted cheerfulness of meals would have departed, meet us again in ch. xii. 19.

Ver. 17.—**Consume away for their iniquity, etc.** Another echo from the book which had entered so largely into the prophet's education (see Lev. xxvi. 39, where the Hebrew for "pine" is the same as that here rendered "consume"). To the wretchedness of physical privation there was to be added the consciousness of the sufferers that it was caused by their own evil deeds.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1, 2.—*A pictorial sermon.* The method of this prophecy is as instructive as the substance of it. Let us, therefore, consider this by itself.

I. IT WAS NOVEL. Hitherto prophets had usually preached by word of mouth, though indeed occasionally they had given visible illustrations of their sermons. Thus Jeremiah had worn a symbolical yoke of iron (Jer. xxviii. 10). But to draw a picture on a tile was a new method of prophecy. The pulpit is generally too conservative of old methods, too timid of innovation. The preacher should not be a slave of fashion. But, then, he should be careful not to be in bondage to an old fashion any more than to a new fashion. He ought to be ready to embrace any novel method that promises to make his work more effective.

II. IT WAS ACCORDING TO THE MANNER OF THE TIMES. The great brick libraries which have been discovered in the very region where Ezekiel was living, and which include works of the very date of his ministry, contain similar pictorial representations—inscribed representations of sieges. Therefore Ezekiel was adapting his teaching to the manners of his contemporaries. It is as though a modern preacher, unable to reach all the persons he desired to address from the pulpit, should write in the newspapers. Therefore the most effective weapon of the day should be secured by the preacher. The enemy have breech-loading rifles: why should the friends of the truth be content with old flint muskets?

III. IT WAS EFFECTIVE. Mere novelty for its own sake is childish. Eccentricity may win notoriety, but it will not honour truth. Erratic methods lower the dignity of truth. The preacher has to remember the solemn, the awful character of his message. But, then, a novel and almost alarming method may be most suitable for conveying the message. In this matter the means must be subservient to the end. Now, Ezekiel's method was remarkably suitable for his purpose. 1. *It made his message intelligible to all.* People who cannot read may understand a picture, and the same picture may speak to men of different languages. Raphael's 'Transfiguration' is intelligible to Englishmen who do not know a word of Italian. Pictorial preaching is easily understood. 2. *It made the message vivid and impressive.* We feel most strongly what we see in picture before our eyes. The failure of preaching is often owing to the fact that the truth proclaimed is accepted only in words which do not suggest clear, strong ideas. It may be admitted by the reason, but it is not embraced by the imagination. The truth which has power over us is not that which we consent to in cold, intellectual agreement, but that which stands to the eyes of the soul as a present reality. Therefore, after we have made our meaning clear and proved our proposition to demonstration, a large part of our work remains, viz. to impress the truth on the imagination and the heart of our hearers; and to be impressive, the truth must be vivid. There is always scope for pictorial preaching. All preachers who are effective with the multitudes resort to this method. 3. *It made the message enduring.* The brick libraries of Babylon which have been deposited in the British Museum are almost as fresh and sound to-day as when they were first produced three thousand years ago. It is just possible that some day Ezekiel's tile may be dug up uninjured! Sermons may be forgotten, but truth endures; and it is the mission of the preacher so to burn the truth into the hearts of his hearers that it shall even outlast Babylonian libraries and be seen through all eternity.

Vers. 4—6.—*Sin-bearing.* Ezekiel is to bear the sin of his people, doing it indeed symbolically every night, by lying first on one side, with the idea that the sin of Israel is upon him so that he cannot move; and then for a shorter period on the other side, with the idea of the sin of Judah resting on him and holding him down. This shows that a prophet is more than a messenger from God to men. He is one of the people, and his function involves his bearing somewhat of their sin. This must be the case with all servants of God who would be helpful to their brethren. Thus Christ's sin-bearing, while it stands alone in its tremendous endurance and its glorious efficacy, is anticipated and followed in a minor degree.

I. SIN-BEARING IS VICARIOUS. 1. It is bearing sin *for others.* Ezekiel took on him the burden of the sin of the guilty nation. Vicarious endurance of sin runs through all life. No man keeps his sin to himself. All who love the sinner bear some of the weight of his sin. Christ the Sinless bears our sin. 2. It is bearing sin *for brethren.* The prophet was to identify himself with his people, and thus to come to bear their sin. Christ became one of us that he might bear our sin for us. Pharisaical scorn for the sin of others betrays the spirit of Cain. 3. It is bearing sin *in true proportion.* The guilt of Israel is greater than that of Judah, and its punishment is accordingly of longer duration. These facts are recognized in Ezekiel's symbolical periods of endurance. As all sin is not equal, all sin does not produce the same distress on the sin-bearer. The aggravation of the world's sin leads to the aggravation of Christ's sufferings. How much has each added to that awful load?

II. SIN-BEARING IS A REAL ENDURANCE. Ezekiel's action was symbolical, but it suggested a true spiritual experience. 1. *Sin is borne vicariously in the thought of it.* We may refuse to note our brother's ill conduct, and if so we may pass it by with indifference. But the prophet must study the signs of the times; the Christ must take the real state of the world into his thought and heart; the man of Christian sympathy must consider deeply and sadly the great sin of mankind. 2. *This is borne in the shame of it.* Each man is only guilty of his own misconduct. Yet we are all conscious of the shame of the sin of those who are closely related to us. A child's sin is his father's shame. The Christian spirit makes the shame of the sin of others felt by those who have escaped it. 3. *This is borne in the suffering of it.* We cannot but suffer for the wickedness of those who are near to us. One who would help and save his brethren must bear the suffering of their sins. Ezekiel in a lower degree anticipated that type of vicarious suffering set forth in Isa. liii., which Christ alone fully realized. The Saviour of men must ever be one who sacrifices himself for men by suffering the hurt of the sin of men.

III. SIN-BEARING IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF DELIVERANCE FROM SIN. We cannot see all the deep mystery of this; but we can discern its glorious issue. 1. *The sin-bearer is a propitiation to God.* The Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world is God's beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased. God cannot be pleased with mere suffering but he may well be delighted with the spirit of obedience, holiness, and love that is manifested in vicarious suffering, and may take this as an ample compensation and a glorious intercession. 2. *The sin-bearing should move the guilty to repentance.* The Jews were to learn a lesson from Ezekiel. Christ's cross preaches repentance.

Ver. 13.—"*Defiled bread.*" Among the many inconveniences of the exile this was to be included, that the Jews would not be able to secure that their food should be cooked in their own manner, and so kept free from ceremonial defilement. But is there not a latent irony in the suggestion of such a thing as a serious calamity? Does it not show that the spirit of the Pharisees, who would strain out a gnat and swallow a camel, had already appeared? These Jews, who would be so alarmed at the prospect of external defilement, had already corrupted and befouled their souls with the vilest sin. Nevertheless, if they *did* feel the shame of the external defilement, it would come to them as a fitting retribution. Outward shame is the just penalty of inward sin.

I. BREAD IS DEFILED WHEN IT IS TAKEN BY A SINNER. All that a bad man touches turns to corruption. The sweetest food becomes foul in the mouth of the wicked. A morally bad musician desecrates the good music which he tries to interpret by breathing into it a corrupt feeling. The best book will be degraded by an evil-minded reader. Such a person will contrive to extract sinful suggestions from the Bible; and then perhaps he will even denounce the sacred volume as immoral in its tendency.

II. BREAD IS DEFILED WHEN IT IS GOT BY EVIL MEANS. The finest wheaten loaf is a corrupt thing when it has been stolen. A dishonest style of business degrades all its proceeds. When a man grows fat on the gains which he has extorted from the helpless by cunning or force, he has brought moral degradation into his home and corruption to his table. The very bread with which he feeds his innocent children is a vile thing, and the hungry poor whom his wicked practices are starving may have the consolation of knowing that the crusts they gnaw in reeking cellars are cleaner in the sight of God than the dainties of his sumptuous banquets.

III. BREAD IS DEFILED WHEN IT IS EATEN IN AN UNWORTHY SPIRIT. If the hand of the Giver is ignored, the bread is at once degraded. It becomes but a dead mass of earth. The heavenly hand that gave it makes its highest value. Taken in faith and gratitude, the common bread of a daily meal has something of a sacramental nature in it. But ingratitude spoils all. The Israelites, loathing the manna in the wilderness and murmuring against their God, did their worst to corrupt the heavenly gift.

IV. BREAD IS DEFILED WHEN IT IS EATEN FOR AN UNWORTHY PURPOSE. 1. *It may be devoured in low animal greed and lust of food.* Then the Divine sanctity of it vanishes, and it becomes a degraded thing. The glutton who lives to eat defiles the best bread. So, too, the man who accepts the other gifts of Providence which are bestowed upon him, solely for self-indulgence, lowers and vitiates all he consumes. 2. *It may be converted into energy for sin.* The bad man goes forth and does wickedly in the strength of the bread which the holy God has given to fit him for the service of goodness. Can any act of defilement be worse than that? To preserve our bread from corruption let us recollect the apostolic direction, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Siege.* By the remarkable symbolism described in this chapter, Ezekiel was himself assured that the metropolis of his country was about to endure the horrors of a siege, and his action was intended for a sign to the house of Israel. Jerusalem, like many of the famous cities of antiquity, and indeed of modern times, underwent the calamity again and again. It was probably the siege by Nebuchadnezzar which was foretold by the symbol of the tile and the iron pan. To be besieged was a not uncommon incident of warfare. But the prophet of God treated this approaching catastrophe, not merely as a fact of history, but as a moral and Divine lesson.

I. THE GENERAL LESSONS VIVIDLY PRESENTED BY A CITY ENDURING A STATE OF SIEGE. 1. *Community in civic life.* Every city always has its own social characteristics. Citizens take a pride in the prosperity and glory of their city, especially if it be the metropolis of the nation. In our own time Paris was besieged by the German army, and its unity was never so realized as when thus encompassed by the enemy. 2. *Community in resistance and hostility.* Distinctions of rank and of social position almost vanish when a common danger threatens every class alike. Each man takes his share in the defence of the city, in bearing the common burden. All are drawn together by their community in dread or in defiance of the foe. 3. *Community in the experience of suffering.* Hunger and thirst, privation and want of rest, are shared by all the citizens of a beleaguered city. Men who partake the same calamity are drawn together by their common experience. The annals of a siege will usually be found to contain the record of remarkable cases of heroic unselfishness and public devotion.

II. THE SPECIAL LESSONS PRESENTED BY THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM. There may well have been manifested a community in spiritual discipline and profit. 1. The vanity of human pride and ambition was strikingly exhibited. The Jews were a vainglorious people; they possessed many distinctive marks of superiority raising them above the heathen, and they knew and boasted that it was so. They took credit to themselves for much for which they ought to have offered thanks to God. Their self-confidence and glorying were rebuked in the most emphatic manner when their fair and famed metropolis was besieged and threatened with destruction. This lesson is impressed upon their countrymen with unsparing faithfulness by the ancient Hebrew prophets. 2. Equally pointed was the lesson conveyed as to the utter vanity of merely human help. The Jews did indeed sometimes seek alliances which might befriend and assist them in their distress; but against such alliances they were repeatedly warned by the prophets, whose duty it was to assure their countrymen of the vanity of the help of man. Especially were they rebuked for seeking friendship and aid from Egypt against the forces of the Eastern foe; and they found such friendship hollow, and such aid ineffectual. 3. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and the people of Judah generally were, by the siege of the city, directed to seek Divine deliverance. The city might fall; its walls might be levelled with the dust; its defenders might be slain; its inhabitants decimated. But all this might be overruled for the nation's real and lasting good, should calamity and humiliation lead to repentance, should Divine favour be entreated, and a way of salvation be opened up to the remnant of the people.—T.

Ver. 4.—*Substitution.* In order to his being a religious teacher and guardian of his nation, it was necessary that Ezekiel should enter into the state of his fellow-countrymen, and even share the sufferings due to their unbelief and rebellion. The Christian reader cannot fail to discern in the prophet of the Captivity a figure by anticipation of the Lord Jesus, who himself "bare our sins and carried our sorrows." Doubtless Christ bore the iniquity of men in a sense in which no other can do so. Yet there is no possibility of benefiting those who are in a state of sin and degradation, except by stooping to their low estate, participating in their lot, enduring somewhat of their sorrow, and thus bearing their iniquity.

I. WHETHER WILLINGLY OR UNWILLINGLY, IN EVERY NATIONAL CALAMITY THE INNOCENT SUFFER WITH THE GUILTY. The guilt is the nation's, the suffering is the individual's. The righteous may witness against the city's sin and rebellion, but they are overtaken by the city's catastrophe. It is not always that the city is spared for the sake of the ten righteous who are found therein. One common ruin may, as in the case of Jerusalem, overwhelm the inhabitants, alike those who have erred and offended, and those who have raised their voice in protest and in censure.

II. THE RIGHTEOUS BEAR THE INIQUITY OF THEIR NEIGHBOURS BY SENSITIVENESS TO THEIR SINS. As Lot was vexed with the filthy conversation of the dwellers in Sodom, as there were those in Jerusalem who sighed and cried for all the abominations done in the city, so in the midst of a corrupt and ungodly community there may be those who lay to heart their neighbours' iniquity, and who feel bitter distress because of conduct which to callous sinners brings no sorrow. It may be granted that this is to some extent a matter of temperament; that a sensitive character will be afflicted by what a calmer, colder disposition bears with impunity. Yet every good man should watch himself, lest familiarity with abounding sin should dull the edge of his spiritual perceptions, lest he should cease to be distressed because of the prevalence of iniquity.

III. THE RIGHTEOUS BEAR BY SYMPATHY THE SUFFERINGS WHICH SIN ENTAILS UPON THEIR NEIGHBOURS. A siege is usually accompanied by most painful and heart-rending incidents; wounds and privations, pestilence and violent death, are all but inseparable from so frightful an aspect of human warfare. The prophet was not a man to think of such incidents, to realize them by vivid imagination and confident anticipation, without being grievously affected. Who is there, with a heart to feel, who can picture to himself the miseries, the disease, the want, the bereavements, which sin daily brings upon every populous city, without taking upon himself something of the burden? We are commanded to "weep with those that weep." And when the calamities which befall our neighbours are the unmistakable results of transgression of Divine commands, we do in a sense bear their iniquities, when we feel for them, and are distressed because of the errors and follies which are the occasion of afflictions and disasters.

IV. The righteous may sometimes, by thus participating in the consequences of their neighbours' iniquity, be the agents in bringing about repentance and deliverance. Our Lord Jesus Christ so identified himself with the sinful race whose nature he assumed, that he is said to have been "made sin" for us; he "bore our sins in his body on the tree." This was seen, by the infinite wisdom of our Father in heaven, to have been the one way by which salvation could be brought to this sinful humanity. Now we are reminded that, in his endurance of the results of men's sins, Jesus left us an example that we should follow in his steps. He is, indeed, the only Propitiation from sin, the only Ransom for sinners. But the principle underlying redemption is a principle which has an application to the spirit and to the moral life of all the followers of Christ. They are in this world, not simply to keep themselves pure from its evil, but to help to purify others from that evil. And this they can only do by bearing the iniquity of their fellow-men; not by keeping themselves aloof from sinners, not by merely censuring and condemning sinners, but by taking the burden of their sins upon their own renewed and compassionate hearts, by entering into their temptations, and helping to rescue them from such snares; and, above all, by bringing them, in compassion and sympathizing love, into the fellowship of that Divine Saviour who gave himself for us, and who bears and takes away the sin of the world. It is by him only that the world's iniquity is to be pardoned and to be abolished, and to be replaced by the love of and by obedience to a righteous and holy God.—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*The chastisement of famine.* The striking and distressing symbolism described in this chapter must have brought with great vividness before the mind of the prophet, and before the minds of his companions in exile, the sufferings that were about to befall the metropolis which was the pride of their hearts. In the siege which was to come upon Jerusalem, the citizens should endure the horrors of privation, of hunger, and of thirst. It was foretold that in a sense this should be God's appointment, the effect of that retributive Providence which devout minds cannot fail to recognize in the government of the world. If such events took place in accordance with what are called general laws, since those laws are the consequence and expression of the very constitution of society, none the less must the Divine hand be recognized, none the less must it be understood that Divine lessons are to be learned with reverent submission.

I. A lesson of corporate unity. As a city, Jerusalem had sinned by rejecting Jehovah's worship, and by honouring the gods of the nations; by disobeying Jehovah's laws, and following sinful impulses and indulging in sinful practices. As a city, Jerusalem sinned; as a city, Jerusalem suffered and fell. The innocent, no doubt, suffered with the guilty; those who mourned over the defection of Judah with those who were prominent agents in that defection. No man can live apart from his neighbours; least of all is this possible in the life of the city, which is characterized by a unity that may be designated corporate.

II. A lesson of physical dependence. Bread, water, and fuel are mentioned in this chapter as necessaries of life; without them men are condemned to famine and to death. The body is in correlation to nature—to the provision made for its sustenance and strength. If the supply be cut off, the body perishes. Familiar and commonplace as this truth is, men need, in their pride and self-confidence, to be reminded of it. The haughty Jews stood in need of the lesson. Let an army invest the city, and it is only a question of time; for the besieged, if unable to beat back the besiegers, must sooner or later surrender to the force of hunger, if not of arms.

III. A lesson of Divine retribution. It is in this light that the calamities attending a siege are presented by the prophet. Men may see in a beleaguered city only a political fact, a military incident, the consequence of well-known causes, the cause of well-understood effects. To see all this is justifiable; to see nothing but this is blindness. A thoughtful and pious mind will look through, will look above, all that is phenomenal. There is purpose in human affairs, there is Divine meaning, there is revelation. When men, oppressed by adversity and threatened with ruin, are "astonied one with another, and pine away in their iniquity," it is possible that they may be so stupefied as to recognize no moral law in their experience, their fate. But the enlightened discern in such events indication of the Divine displeasure and indignation with sin. Chastisement, punishment, is no chimera invented by a heated imagination; it is a sober, albeit a painful fact, from which there is no escape and no appeal. The judgments of God are abroad in the earth; and this is that the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness.

IV. A LESSON OF REPENTANCE AND OF MERCY. This lesson is not, indeed, explicitly presented in this passage; yet the whole prophetic symbolism leads up to it. Why are men hungry but that they may call for the bread of life? and upon whom shall they call but upon God? Whither shall the parched and thirsting turn but to him who has the water of life, for the quenching of their thirst and the satisfaction of their souls? To whom shall the afflicted address themselves but to him who can turn the outward curse into a spiritual blessing, who can make the scourge the means of healing, and the sword the means of life? In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy; and it is ever true that they who call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved.—T.

Vers. 1—8.—*Vicarious suffering.* Every true prophet is a forerunner of Jesus Christ. We do not detract from the work of the Saviour—we magnify it—when we discern that the same kind of work (though not equal in measure or effectiveness) had been done by the prophets. Ezekiel was called of God, not only to teach heavenly doctrine, but also to suffer for the people. "Thou shalt bear their iniquities." No one can be a faithful servant of God who does not suffer for the cause he serves. Suffering is the badge of a Divine commission.

I. EVERY PROPHET IS A VICAR. He represents God before the people; he represents the people before God. In his whole person, action, suffering, mission, he is a type of Jesus Christ. When men will not listen to his words, he is commanded to speak to them by deeds. The life of the prophet is a prophecy. Ezekiel deals with these captives as with sullen children. To the ignorant he became as ignorant. He condescended to their low estate. Being made dumb by reason of their perversity, he pursues his heavenly task in another way—he teaches them by pictures, object-lesson, deed-symbol. It is "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." So long as there remains an avenue to the heart, God will not abandon men.

II. HIS SUFFERING IS VICARIOUS. This prophet was not himself free from sin, and suffering was its effect. Yet the suffering described in this chapter is wholly vicarious. What was justly due to others was laid upon him by God. "I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity." Yet this was impossible without the prophet's willing consent. In proportion as the prophet's mind had expanded under the Divine afflatus, he had considered and comprehended the magnitude of Israel's sin. Their *past* and their *present* iniquity was clear and vivid to his mind. He saw its extent and aggravation. He perceived the moral turpitude. He felt its baseness and criminality. He foresaw its bitter fruits. The burden of a nation's sin pressed upon his conscience. He drew it in upon himself and confessed it before God. But, further, Ezekiel represented in himself the severity of Divine judgment—God's sense of sin. Hence he was required to lie upon one side for the space of three hundred and ninety days—a pain to himself, a passive rebuke to the people, in order to represent in visible form God's indignation. Yet there was pictured forth also Divine compassion. Just severity was alleviated; there was but a day for a year. Jerusalem was sacrificed, but it was in order that the people might be saved. Not an item was overlooked by God. The proportionate guilt of Israel and Judah was vividly symbolized in the several acts of the prophet. The one end sought was—*repentance.*

III. HIS ACTION IS VICARIOUS. The prophet was a Hebrew, a priest; he loved Jerusalem. Possibly affection was bestowed on the city, which belonged alone to

God. For Ezekiel to represent the Babylonian invaders, for him to invest the city with fire and sword, this must have been gall and wormwood. Yet, in vision, he had eaten the roll of God's behests, had digested and assimilated the knowledge of his will. Therefore, in his vicarious character, he has to set his face against the city as the impersonation of the foe; he has to "make bare his arm" to typify the resolute energy of the spoiler. Be the effect upon the Jewish chiefs, already in captivity, what it may; be the effect to exasperate feeling against the prophet or to produce repentance; the prophet is constrained to fulfil his task by a Divine necessity. "Bands are upon him."

IV. HIS ENDURANCE OF RIDICULE IS VICARIOUS. We can well suppose that many who visited Ezekiel in his dwelling would fail to perceive the propriety or utility of this long and irksome penance. They would sneer and laugh at this toy-siege, at this childish exposure of an outstretched arm, at this constant recumbence on one side. Be it so; the prophet continues his task unmoved. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." Littleness and greatness are matters about which men egregiously err. Ezekiel, in his humiliation, was as magnanimous and noble an actor in life's drama as Elijah on Carmel vindicating in solitary sublimity Jehovah's power. What could be baser to the vulgar eye of the world than to bear a felon's cross through the streets, and then to hang in nakedness and pain thereon? "But God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty . . . and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are." Like his Divine Master, Ezekiel "despised the shame."—D.

Vers. 9—17.—*A symbolic famine.* The moral intention for which God imposed this series of painful privations on his prophet was *this*, viz. to convince the people that their expectation of a speedy return to Jerusalem was vain and futile. Their honoured city, around which God had so long thrown the shield of his protection, could not (so they thought) long remain in the power of the heathen. To explode this bubble-delusion, God represented before their eyes the rigours of a military siege, the privations and hardships of the beleaguered inhabitants, along with the final discomfiture of the city's guilty defenders. The prophet in Babylon is still a scapegoat for the people. On *him* the weight of the stroke at present rests. The bonds of sympathy with the people's best interests constrained the prophet to suffer *with* them and *for* them. Hence, during three hundred and ninety days he ate no pleasant bread; he lived on the narrowest rations. In the midst of surrounding plenty, he fared (for sublime moral reasons) with the hard-pressed and beleaguered Jews. Now, famine has its moral uses.

I. IT BRINGS TO MEMORY THE FORMER AFFLUENCE OF GOD'S PROVISION. If it is possible to sustain our life with ten ounces of bread per diem, and this bread of the coarsest description, then all that we obtain beyond this is proof of the exuberant kindness of our God. As transgressors against God's Law, we should not expect more than bare subsistence—mere prison fare; we have no right to claim even that. Taking this scale with which to measure our former possessions and comforts, we may gain some conception of the amazing love of God. Would that, side by side with a clear *idea* of his goodness, there was also adequate *impression!* Every gift of Providence, in excess of bare sustenance, is a token of God's tender affection; brings a message of kindness—is a gospel.

II. FAMINE MAY WELL CONVINCE US OF OUR SINS. We may safely conclude that it is not for small reason that God deprives men of nature's kindly gifts. The internal monitor, as well as the external prophet, teaches us that this interruption of providential supplies is God's act. Many and strange factors may intervene, but a clear eye looks through and beyond all inferior causes, until it discovers the rule of the great First Cause. The pride of earthly kings, the march of armies, the scrutiny of martial sentinels, biting frosts, blustering winds, inroads of insects—a thousand things may serve as the nearest visible cause of famine; but a devout mind will regard all these as the agents and administrators of the most high God. For no other reason would he manifest his anger, save for moral transgression, wilful disloyalty! He would have us to see and to feel how great an evil is sin, by the serious mischief it works—yea, by the severity of his own displeasure. Even famine serves as the Master's ferule, if it brings us back to childlike obedience.

III. Famine proves to us how easy it is for God to afflict. Very obvious is it that frail man hangs on God by a thousand delicate threads. Ten thousand minute avenues are open by which an enemy can approach, chastisement come near. We almost shudder as we think of the manifold forms, and of the majestic ease, with which the avenging God could scourge his rebellious creatures. Let him but change one ingredient in the all-nurturing air, and instead of inhaling health, we should, with every breath, inhale fiery poison. If but the appetite fail, if the digestive organs become weak, if secretions stay their process, lassitude and decay speedily follow. It is enough that God should speak a word, and life for us would be stripped of charm. We should crave to die.

IV. This scarcity proves that present chastisement is disciplinary. It is not sudden and irremediable death. If God intended *that*, he would have chosen some other punitive weapon. But this reduction of food to a minimum, this suspension of enjoyment, these obnoxious necessities in preparing a meal, all indicate correction with a view to repentance. If only the sighs of true penitence arise, then quicker than flashing light does God run to remove the burden from our shoulders. To punish men is a grief to God; to pardon is his delight. Yet if present corrections avail nothing to produce righteous obedience, the final infliction will be irrevocable and overwhelming.

V. Prayer modifies, if it does not remove, the severity of the stroke. The windows of heaven were shut and opened again at the breath of Elijah's prayer. Ezekiel humbly remonstrates with God that he may not be required to violate ceremonial purity. At once the command of God is modified. The tenderness of the prophet's conscience is to be respected. God alters not his plans without sufficient cause; this is sufficient cause. This particular step in his procedure was clearly foreseen; and it was to bring out this request from Ezekiel that the first demand was made. Prayer not only expresses mental desire; it strengthens it also. It does us good every way. It fits us to enjoy, and to improve, the blessing. It softens chastisement.—D.

Vers. 1—17.—*The siege of Jerusalem and the sufferings of the people symbolized.* "Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem," etc. This chapter presents difficulties to the student. There is the question whether it is to be understood literally or metaphorically; or, more correctly, whether the things here set forth were really done or were only visional. The commands given in vers. 1—3 might have been literally executed; but the directions of vers. 4—8 could not have been literally carried out. Hence Fairbairn and others conclude that the actions must have taken place in vision. "It is enough to suppose," says Dr. Currey, "that when the prophet was bidden to do such acts, they were impressed upon his mind with all the vividness of actual performance. In spirit, he grasped the sword and scattered the hair (ch. v. 1—4), and saw herein the coming events thus symbolized. They would only have lost force by substituting bodily for mental action. The command of God gave to the *sign* the vividness of a real transaction, and the prophet communicated it to the people, just as it had been stamped on his own mind, with more impressiveness than could have been conveyed by the language of ordinary metaphor." Again, it is by no means easy to decide what is the precise reference of the three hundred and ninety days, and the forty days, each day for a year. The different interpretations have been so ably sustained by their respective advocates, that it seems to us that it would be presumptuous dogmatically to assert that it must mean either one or another. But let us endeavour to discover the homiletic aspects of this chapter.

I. Inquire the reason why, in this chapter and elsewhere, God has made known his will by remarkable symbols. There are many such symbols in the prophecies by Ezekiel. And in those by Jeremiah we have the rod of an almond tree, and the seething pot (i. 11—16), the linen girdle, and the bottles of wine (xiii.), the potter's earthen vessel (xix.), the two baskets of figs (xxiv.), and the yoke of iron (xxviii.). Many other examples might be cited from other portions of the sacred Scriptures. We cannot think that these striking symbols were employed to conceal truth, or to make the apprehension of the truth more difficult. That would have been inconsistent with revelation—the contradiction of revelation. And it seems to us that it would have been out of harmony with the character of God to have used remarkable symbols to obscure his Word. They were intended rather, we conceive, to arouse attention, to stimulate inquiry, and impress upon the mind the truths shadowed forth by them. Fairbairn has well said, "As the meaning obviously did not lie upon the surface, it called for serious thought and inquiry regarding the purposes of God. A time of general backsliding and corruption is always a time of superficial thinking on spiritual things. And just as our Lord, by his parables, that partly veiled while they disclosed the truth of God, so the prophets, by their more profound and enigmatical discourses, sought to arouse the careless from their security, to awaken inquiry, and stir the depths of thought and feeling in the soul. It virtually said to them, 'You are in imminent peril; direct ordinary discourse no longer suits your case; bestir yourselves to look into the depths of things, otherwise the sleep of death shall overtake you.'"

II. ENDEAVOUR TO SET FORTH THE MEANING OF THESE REMARKABLE SYMBOLS. 1. *Here is a representation of the siege of Jerusalem.* (Vers. 1—3.) Directions are given to Ezekiel to portray a siege of the holy city; and to prepare the fort or siege-tower, and the mound, and the encampments, and battering-rams, and lay siege to it. Notice: (1) The great Agent in this siege. The prophet was to besiege it, acting as the representative of Jehovah. "If the prophet, as commissioned by God, enters on such a siege, the real besieger of Jerusalem is the Lord God; and the Chaldeans appear as mere instruments in the Divine hand" (Schröder). Nebuchadnezzar and his army unconsciously did the work of God. And the prophet was to do his work with resolution and might (ver. 7). The uncovered arm indicates one about to engage in vigorous exertion (cf. Isa. lii. 10). So the siege here foreshadowed would be prosecuted with determination and power. (2) The cause of this siege. The sin of the people has brought it upon them. This is indicated by the iron pan or plate which Ezekiel was to set up between himself and the city (ver. 3). "It is clear from the expression, *between thee and the city*, that a relation of *separation*, of division, between Jerusalem as portrayed upon the brick and the representative of God is meant to be expressed. Only on the ground of such a relation between God and Jerusalem can we explain alike the hostile attitude of the prophet's face, and especially the clause, *and it is in siege*, and along with that, vers. 1 and 2" (Schröder). "Their iniquities had separated between them and their God" (Isa. lix. 2). That their calamities were caused by their sins appears also from the prophet being called to bear the iniquity of the house of Israel and the house of Judah (vers. 5, 6). And in the last verse it is expressly stated that they should "consume away for their iniquity." Sin is the one great cause of suffering and sorrow, of calamity and loss. 2. *Here is a representation of the sufferings of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* (1) These are symbolized by the prostrate attitude of the prophet bearing the sins of the people (vers. 4—6). In the former portion of the chapter Ezekiel represents the Lord; but here and in subsequent verses he represents the besieged and suffering people. His lying down, and inability to turn from one side to another, "is a figure of the wretched condition of the people during the time of the siege" (cf. Ps. xx. 8; Isa. l. 11; Amos v. 2). (2) The miseries of the people are also represented by the scarcity of food and its loathsome associations. The prophet is directed to "take wheat, and barley, and beans," etc. (ver. 9). "It is suggested in this way that the besieged will in their distress be compelled to gather together everything that can possibly be turned into bread. This state of matters is represented yet more strongly by means of the *one vessel*, which shows that of each separate sort not much more is to be had" (Schröder). Ezekiel, moreover, has to take his food by weight and measure, and only at long intervals (vers. 10, 11). And although in that country less is needed to sustain life than in our colder climate, yet the quantity allowed the prophet is not more than half what is usually regarded as necessary. The quantity, as some one observes, was too much for dying, too little for living. So would the people suffer want and hunger during the long siege. From the scarcity of food we proceed to its impurity. It is represented as having been baked with fuel of the most offensive kind—with human ordure (ver. 12). But in answer to a pathetic appeal of the prophet, he is allowed to use the dried ordure of cattle instead thereof. To this he made no objection. "He was, in fact, used to it; for the dried dung of beasts is used for fuel throughout the East wherever wood is scarce, from Mongolia to Palestine. Its use, indeed, extends into Europe, and subsists even in England."[1] The significance of this symbol is stated: "Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their defiled bread among the Gentiles, whither I will drive them." The reference is to the impurities of heathenism. Those who in their own land had disregarded the commands of God would in their exile find the corruptions of heathenism a grievous offence unto them. And then in its close (vers. 16, 17) the chapter recurs to the sufferings during the siege. The misery was to grow and to become so great as to cause amazement and dismay. The people would take their scanty portion in deep sorrow; and so great would be the scarcity of the prime necessaries of life as to strike them dumb with anguish. Such were the miseries which they had brought upon themselves by their long course of sin.

III. APPLY THE INSTRUCTIONS WHICH THIS SUBJECT HAS FOR US. 1. *An impressive illustration of the omniscience of God.* Nothing less than infinite knowledge could have foretold to Ezekiel the things symbolized in this chapter. They did not seem in the least degree probable when he published them. "If we accept," says Dr. Currey, "the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity (as is most probable) for the year in which Ezekiel received this communication, . . . it was a time at which such an event would, according to human calculation, have appeared improbable. Zedekiah was the creature of the King of Babylon, ruling by his authority in the place of Jehoiachin, who was still alive; and it could scarcely have been expected that Zedekiah would have been so infatuated as to provoke the anger of the powerful Nebuchadnezzar." Yet he did so; and this prophecy was fulfilled. Nothing can be hidden from God (Ps. cxxxix.). To him the future is visible as the present. This is exhibited by Isaiah as an evidence that the Lord is the true God (Isa. xli. 21—29; xliv. 6—8; xlvi. 9—11). 2. *Sin transforms persons and places in the sight of God.* Think of what Jerusalem had been before him: "the city of God;" "the faithful city;" "the holy city;" "the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth." But now, alas, how changed it is! Formerly he had been its Defender; now he has become its Besieger. Sin darkens and deforms human character; it takes away the glory of cities and covers them with shame. 3. *The certainty of the punishment of sin.* The chosen people shall not escape punishment if they persist in sin. The sacred city, with the temple which God had chosen as his dwelling-place (Ps. cxxxii. 13, 14), will afford no protection to a people who have obstinately rebelled against him. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished;" "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," etc. Sin carries within itself the germ of its own punishment. 4. *The power of God to inflict punishment upon the obstinately rebellious.* He can use the heathen as his instruments for this purpose. He can break the staff of bread, and dry up the springs of water, etc. 5. *The heinousness and perilousness of sin.* (Cf. Jer. ii. 19; xliv. 4.) Let us cultivate hearty obedience to the Lord God.—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER V.

Ver. 1.—**Take thee a barber's razor, etc.** The series of symbolic acts is carried further. Recollections of Isaiah and Leviticus mingle strangely in the prophet's mind. The former had made the "razor" the symbol of the devastation wrought by an invading army (Isa. vii. 20). The latter had forbidden its use for the head and beard of the priests (Lev. xix. 27; xxi. 5). Once again Ezekiel is commanded to do a forbidden thing as a symbolic act. He is, for the moment, the representative of the people of Jerusalem, and there is to be, as of old, a great destruction of that people as "by a razor that is hired." The word for "barber" (perhaps "hair-cutter") does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament, but its use may be noted as showing that then, as now, the "barber" was a recognized institution in every Eastern town. The word for "knife" (Josh. v. 2; 1 Kings xviii. 28) is used in ver. 2, and commonly throughout the Old Testament, for "sword," and is so translated here by the LXX. and Vulgate. The prophet is to take a "sword" and use it as a razor, to make the symbolism more effective.

Ver. 2.—**Thou shalt burn with fire, etc.** The symbolism receives its interpretation in ver. 12. A third part of the people (we need not expect numerical exactness) was to perish in the city of pestilence and famine, another to fall by the sword in their attempts to escape, yet another third was to be scattered to the far-off land of their exile, and even there the sword was to follow them. The words, in the midst of the city, and the days of the siege, find their most natural explanation in ch. iv. 1, 5, 6.

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[1] See Kitto's 'Daily Bible Illustrations.'

Vers. 3, 4.—Thou shalt also take, etc. The words may point (1) either to those in Jerusalem who had escaped the famine and the sword, and were left in the land (2 Kings xxv. 22; Jer. xl. 6; lii. 16); or (2) to those who should go into exile, and yet even there suffer from the "fire" of God's chastening judgments. They were, if saved at all, to be saved "so as by fire" (1 Cor. iii. 15), to be as "brands plucked from the burning" (Amos iv. 11; Zech. iii. 2). Isaiah's thought of the "remnant" (Isa. x. 20—22; xi. 11—16) seems hardly to come in here. The whole utterance is one of denunciation. The act of "binding in the skirts" implies only a limited protection. Omit "for," and for "thereof" read "therefrom," *i.e.* from the fire (Revised Version).

Ver. 5.—This is Jerusalem, etc. The strange acted parables cease, and we have the unfigurative interpretation. The words that follow point to the central position of Jerusalem in the geography, and therefore in the history, of the ancient East: Egypt to the south, Assyria and Babylon to the north, and in the nearer distance Moabites and Ammonites, and Edomites, and Phœnicians, and Philistines; to all of these Jerusalem might have been as a city set on a hill, as the light of the Gentiles. That had been her ideal position from the first, as in the visions of Micah iv. 1 and Isa. ii. 1 it was to be in its ideal future. The words are not without interest, as probably having suggested the thought, prominent in mediæval geography (Dante, 'Inf.,' xxxiv. 115, and the Hereford 'Mappa Mundi'), that Jerusalem was physically the central point of the earth's surface. So Moslems believe Mecca to be the earth's centre, and the Greek word *omphalos* was applied to Delphi as implying the same belief.

Ver. 6.—She hath changed, etc. To that calling Jerusalem had been unfaithful. *Corruptio optimi pessima*, and she had sunk to a lower level than the nations round about her. For changed my judgments into wickedness, read, with the Revised Version, *hath rebelled against my judgments in doing wickedness*. The pronoun refers, not to the nations, but to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and so in the next clause.

Ver. 7.—Because ye multiplied, etc.; better, with the Revised Version, *because ye are turbulent*. The verb is cognate with the noun translated "tumult" in 1 Sam. iv. 14; Ps. lxv. 7; Isa. xxxiii. 3, though it is more commonly rendered "multitude." It is not (as stated by Currey and Gardiner) the verb rendered "rage" in Ps. ii. 1. The former meaning fits in fairly here, but some critics (Smend) suppose that the text is corrupt. A conjectural emendation gives, "ye were counted with the nations." Neither have done according to the judgments; better, with the Revised Version, *ordinances*. Taking the words as they stand, the words find their explanation in Jer. ii. 10, 11. In doing as the nations (ch. xi. 12; xvi. 47), Jerusalem had *not* done as they did, for they were at least true to the gods whom they worshipped, and she had rebelled against her God. Some Hebrew manuscripts and some versions omit the negative, but this is probably a correction made in order to bring about a verbal agreement with ch. xi. 12.

Ver. 8.—Therefore, etc. The conjunction is emphatic. It was because Jerusalem, in her high estate, had sinned so conspicuously that her punishment was to be equally conspicuous (comp. Lam. iv. 6; Amos iii. 2).

Ver. 9.—I will do in thee, etc. The like words were spoken by our Lord of the destruction of the city that was then future (Matt. xxiv. 21); but the words of Ezekiel manifestly refer to that which was within the horizon of his vision, and find their parallel in Dan. ix. 12; Lam. i. 12; ii. 13.

Ver. 10.—The fathers shall eat their sons, etc. An echo from Lev. xxvi. 29 and Deut. xxviii. 53. The words of Jer. xix. 9 and Lam. iv. 10 imply that horrors such as these occurred during the siege of the city by the Chaldeans, as they had occurred before in the siege of Samaria (2 Kings vi. 28, 29), and were to occur afterwards in that by the Romans (Josephus, 'Bell Jud.,' vi. 4. § 4). The whole remnant, etc. (comp. ver. 2).

Ver. 11.—Because thou hast defiled my sanctuary, etc. For the full account of the nature of the abominations which are thus spoken of, see notes on ch. viii. This was, after all, the root-evil of all other evils. Pollution of worship, the degradation of the highest element in man's nature, passed into pollution and degradation of his whole life. Even in our Lord's acted teaching, in John ii. 15, 16 and Matt. xxi. 12, we have the same principle implied. Therefore will I also diminish thee, etc. The italics show that the last word is not in the Hebrew. The Revised Version margin suggests two other renderings. (1) *Therefore will I also withdraw mine eye that it shall not spare*; and (2) *Therefore will I hew thee down*. To these we may add the LXX. *I will reject*, and the Vulgate *I will break in pieces*, which apparently, like (2), imply a different reading. Most recent critics suggest conjectural em dations of the text. I incline to rest satisfied with the Authorized Version, and to explain it by ch. xvi. 27. The word implies not only the decrease, but the entire withdrawal of Jehovah's favour. Possibly there is an implied reference to the command of Deut. iv. 2; xii. 32. Jerusalem had "diminished" from the Law of God, had, as it were, erased the commandments which were of supreme obligation, and therefore, as by a *lex talionis*, God would diminish her. **Neither will I have any pity.** The words are, of course, anthropomorphic, and have therefore to be received with the necessary limitations. As the earthly minister of justice must not yield to a weak pity which would be incompatible with the assertion of the eternal law of righteousness, so neither will the Supreme Judge. There is a time for all things, and justice must do its work first, in order that there may be room for pity afterwards. For other assertions, which seems strange to us, of this unpitying character of God, see ch. vii. 4, 9; viii. 18; ix. 10, *et al.*; Jer. xiii. 14.

Ver. 12.—A third part of thee, etc. (see note on ver. 2). The strange symbolic act is now interpreted. **I will draw out a sword, etc.** The phrase recurs in ch. xii. 14, and is found in Lev. xxvi. 33—an echo, like so many other passages in Ezekiel, from what seems to have been his favourite storehouse of thought and language (Lev. xvii.—xxvi.).

Ver. 13.—I will cause my fury to rest upon them, etc.; Revised Version, *I will satisfy*, etc. The phrase meets us again in ch. xvi. 42; xxi. 17; xxiv. 13. To "rest" here is to "repose" rather than to "abide." The thought is that a righteous anger, like that of Jehovah, rests (*i.e.* is quieted) when it has done its work, and that in this sense God is "comforted," either as rejoicing in the punishment of evil for its own sake (as in Deut. xxviii. 63; Isa. i. 24), or because the punishment does its work in leading men to repentance. Israel may be comforted, because God is comforted as he sees that his judgments have done their work, and that his wrath can find repose. **Have spoken in my zeal.** The thought implied is that what is spoken in the earnest purpose of "zeal" will assuredly be carried into execution (comp. Isa. ix. 7; xxxvii. 32). Men might deride the prophet's warning as an idle threat. It would prove itself to have come from God.

Ver. 14.—In the sight of them that pass by. The phrase reminds us of Lam. i. 12; ii. 15; and the latter was probably a conscious reproduction of it. The scorn and mockery of the heathen who rejoiced in her humiliation were to be the keenest pang in the punishment of the guilty city.

Ver. 15.—A reproach and a taunt, etc. An echo of Deut. xxviii. 37. The accumulation of synonyms in both clauses of the verse is eminently characteristic of Ezekiel's style. Word follows word, like the strokes of a sledge-hammer. The word for "instruction" is that which occurs so often in the Book of Proverbs (i. 2, 3, and in twenty-two other passages). In Deut. xi. 12; Isa. liii. 5; Jer. xxx. 14, the Authorized Version renders it "chastisement," and that sense is manifestly implied here. Jerusalem was, as it were, to be the great object-lesson in God's education of mankind. And the final stroke of all is that the words were not the prophet's own, but "I the Lord have spoken it." The words reappear in ver. 17.

Ver. 16.—The evil arrows of famine, etc. The thought of the "arrows" of God's judgment may have been taken from Deut. xxxii. 23, 42, and occurs frequently also in the Psalms (Ps. vii. 13; xxxviii. 2, *et al.*). Clothed in the language of poetry, the attributes of Jehovah included those of the *Far-darter* of the Greeks. **Which shall be for their destruction, etc.**; better, as Revised Version, *that are for destruction*. Ewald looks on the noun as a personification, like Abaddon, also translated "destruction" in Job xxviii. 22 and Prov. xv. 11, and renders the words, "that are from hell;" but there seems no special reason for assuming such a meaning here. It is noticeable that, as in the symbolism of ch. iv. 9—17, the famine is more prominent in Ezekiel's thoughts than the other punishments.

Ver. 17.—Evil beasts, etc. These appear in like connection in Ezekiel's favourite textbooks (comp. Lev. xxvi. 6, 22; Deut. xxxii. 24). They reappear in ch. xiv. 15, 21. Historically, we have an example of the suffering thus caused in the lions of 2 Kings xvii. 25, when towns and villages were deserted, and the unburied carcases of those who had died by famine, or pestilence, or the sword, were everywhere to attract them from afar. This was, of course, the natural and inevitable result. **Pestilence and blood, etc.** As this is followed by the work of the sword, "blood" probably points to some special form of plague, possibly dysentery (Acts xxviii. 8, Revised Version), or carbuncles, like Hezekiah's boil (Isa. xxxviii. 21). The same combination appears in ch. xiv. 19; xxviii. 23.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—4.—*"A barber's razor."* The coming siege and destruction of Jerusalem are described under the image of the prophet shaving his head and then disposing of his hair in various ways. The razor stands for the Divine judgment, the hair for the people, the different treatment of the hair for the difference in the doom of the people.

I. DIVINE JUDGMENT IS KEEN AS A RAZOR. Some judgments crush, others cut. The latter do not dispose of their victims at a blow. More is reserved for the hair that has been shaved off; for it is to be burnt, etc. But first of all the head is shorn. Thus judgment is progressive. Now, the first stage throws down pride, breaks up the established order, and casts the miserable sufferers into a state of dismay. This is irresistible. Slender hair cannot resist sharp steel. Feeble man cannot stand up against the penetrating judgment of Heaven.

II. IN PUNISHING A NATION GOD PUNISHES INDIVIDUALS. Each hair is a separate growth, and in shaving the whole head the razor cuts through individual hairs. It is too commonly imagined that burdens can be shifted from the individual to the nation. But if this were universally done there would be no gain, as the nation is nothing more than the aggregate of the individuals that compose it; and if it were only partially done, injustice would be inflicted on the many for the relief of the few. In Divine judgments there is no escaping on account of the wholesale and national character of what happens. Great general wars lay homesteads desolate, bring mourning to separate households, impoverish private businesses, kill individual men.

III. IN A GENERAL JUDGMENT THERE ARE VARIETIES OF DOOM. The hair is to be divided out, and the several portions are then to be dealt with in different ways. The siege of Jerusalem results in a variety of dreadful calamities. Some of the citizens perish from fire, famine, or disease; some are killed by the sword; some are driven into exile. No doubt there will be varieties of doom in the future world. All will not suffer the same penalties, and yet the just punishment of sin must be unspeakably awful in every instance.

IV. IN THE MOST HEAVY JUDGMENT SOME ARE SPARED. Ezekiel is to take a few hairs and bind them in his skirts. Eight people were saved from the Flood. Three were saved from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Christians who fled to Pella escaped the horrors of the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Thus the doctrine of the "remnant" is repeatedly exemplified. None are so obscure as to be overlooked by God. He is not indiscriminate in his judgment. The faithful are safe in the most overwhelming destruction. Those who are God's true people are well guarded and cared for by him. Such have no occasion to fear any future judgment-day.

V. ESCAPE FROM ONE JUDGMENT IS NO ASSURANCE OF FINAL SAFETY. Ver. 4 seems to teach that some who escaped from the horrors of the siege would yet be cut off by some later calamity. God's forbearance is no excuse for man's indifference. Judgment deferred is not judgment destroyed. It is possible to turn aside from God in one's later days after serving him truly in one's earlier life, and then the safety of the past must give place to peril.

Ver. 5.—*A central position.* Jerusalem was in a central position. Palestine was in the very midst of the nations. The highway between Assyria and Egypt ran through her territory. Seated on the shores of the Mediterranean, she was midway between the great empires of the East and the mysterious world of the West. England is now in a position like that of ancient Palestine, but with a much larger sweep of circumference. This island looks eastward to Europe and Asia, and it is in the highway from the Old World to America. London is the commercial capital of the world. England, more than any other country, has interests and influence in the four quarters of the globe. Then there are individual men in central positions. This is so of all persons in posts of authority. It is also true in a very real sense of everybody. Each man is the centre of his own horizon; the range of his vision and voice extend in a circle all round him. Throw a stone where you will into a pond, and at once it becomes a centre of spreading circles of wavelets. We are all centres of influence. This central position involves great consequences.

I. A HIGH PRIVILEGE. Jerusalem was privileged in her position; so is England to-day. The products of all the world pour into our markets. The garnered experience of the ages and the wide wealth of thought that grows in many minds are at our disposal. Jerusalem in the days of the prophets had many faults, but narrow-mindedness was not one. We see her seated on the great plain of the world's history. In like manner there is a happy richness, a variety and breadth of knowledge, of which we in England to-day are able to avail ourselves. As individuals, we are in the midst of many enriching sources. Tennyson's Ulysses says, "I am a part of all that I have met." We are able to profit by multitudinous influences from many quarters. We should not stultify these influences by parochial narrowness, but welcome and use all the helps God sends, *e.g.* in good books, inspiriting lives, wise and good public movements.

II. A UNIQUE POSITION. Jerusalem was in the midst of the nations, yet she was separate from them. She was not to follow the example of her neighbours. She was called to a unique destiny. Alone knowing the true God, she was to serve him in the full blaze of the world, but in separation from the contamination of neighbouring religions. This is the Christian destiny; not to forsake society and cultivate religion in seclusion, but to live in the world, yet free from the spirit of the world—a citizen of heaven residing as God's ambassador on earth.

III. A GREAT MISSION. Jerusalem was planted in the midst of the nations to be a power for good among them. God did not convey his chosen people to some distant "Isles of the Blessed." They were set down in the centre of the great stage of the world's history. They were a separate people, it is true—a sort of Belgium between Egypt and Assyria—the France and Germany of those days. But they had their mission in the end, to give the true religion to all nations. England is most advantageously situated for blessing other nations. We of all peoples should be a missionary nation. The Church of Christ is in the midst of the people, not like Noah's ark, only destined to secure the safety of those shut up inside it, but like leaven put into the meal to leaven the whole lump. Every Christian Church is in the midst of the people, in a neighbourhood for which it should be a centre of light. So also individual men, according as they are in any sort of central positions, are there for the good they can confer. No life can be pure in its purpose or strong in its strife, and all life not be purer and stronger thereby.

IV. A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY. Jerusalem is called to account. England will have her day of reckoning. We shall all be judged, especially as to our conduct in places of privilege and influence. 1. We are responsible for our *privileges*. Assyria was not judged as Judæa; Africa and England will not be measured by the same standard. Much is expected of them to whom much has been given. 2. We are responsible for our *influence*. The effects of our work, word, and example will come back upon our own heads in blessings or in curses.

V. A SHAMEFUL FAILURE. Jerusalem missed her great mission and fell from her high estate. The fall of favoured Palestine is a warning to favoured England. It is possible to have every advantage and yet to make shipwreck. Then the bigger the ship the greater the wreck. There is something inspiriting in the thought of a mission. It helps one to make the best use of life. The idea that we are useless will certainly lead to indifference and paralyze our energies. But to accept a place of influence and its privileges and then to fall, is the most culpable of all things.

Ver. 8.—*Opposed by God.* We are more familiar with the idea of our opposition to God than with that of his opposition to us, because he is long-suffering and slow to anger, while we are rebellious and self-willed. But there is a point where infinite patience cannot restrain just wrath; where, indeed, without any conflict of Divine attributes, the very love of God must acquiesce in his resistance to our sinful conduct by stern measures. Then God is against us!

I. GOD'S OPPOSITION IS PROVOKED BY MAN'S REBELLION. 1. *God is not originally opposed to any of his creatures.* "He hateth nothing that he hath made." Nor can we suppose that God turns against his children for reasons of his own apart from their conduct. There is no caprice in the heart of the Immutable. It seems to some men in their deepening adversity, as blow after blow falls upon them, that God has become their enemy. This is a trial to faith; but true faith should survive and cry in the tempest of trouble, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." 2. *The cause of God's opposition lies in men alone.* Ours is the change, not his. The Israelites in the wilderness "provoked" him to wrath. As he is always graciously inclined, it always lies with us to determine whether he shall be our Friend or our Enemy. It is fearful to make an Enemy of our best Friend. But can we expect that persistent neglect, deepening into disobedience, and disobedience pushed to the extremity of rebellion, should be regarded with indifference by the Lord of heaven and earth?

II. THE OPPOSITION OF GOD IS UNSPEAKABLY DREADFUL. It is dangerous for man to run counter to the will of God; it is fatal for God to rouse himself in opposition to man. The man who falls on the chosen Stone is bruised, but he on whom it falls will be ground to powder (Matt. xxi. 44). There is in this a Divine activity. The sinner does not suffer only negatively, by privation, by the loss of Divine grace. His doom is more than to be cast into the outer darkness, and to be left there in a God-deserted solitude. That would be bad enough. But it must be remembered that God is active, and is ever making his will felt by his children. If a man swallows arsenic, the poison will work in him by the exercise of its own corrosive properties. In opposing the laws of nature we bring those laws into active play against us. It is like running in face of an express train. The result is incomparably worse than running against a dead wall. The dreadfulness of the Divine opposition thus encountered is only to be measured by the might and energy of God. The very fact that he loves us, instead of mitigating the horror of the opposition, must heighten it, for no plea can soften the blow when love itself acquiesces in it. If a hard master punished we might hope to soften him, but if a God of love is against us there is no further appeal.

III. THE DIVINE OPPOSITION IS A LESSON FOR ALL WHO WITNESS IT. The judgments were to be executed "in the sight of the nations." This would add to the humiliation of the Jews. It would be a shock to the self-complacency that was founded on the notion that for the sake of his own honour among the heathen God would uphold his chosen people. That notion was a delusion. God's honour is not maintained by protecting his people in their sin. It is more manifest in the impartial execution of justice without any rebate on the ground of favouritism. God is not honoured now by the simple security of his Church, but by the purity of it. It is better for the cause of righteousness that fallen Christians should be shamed and cast out, than that they should be petted and spared and their wickedness hushed up. The fall and judgment of the Jews proclaimed to all the world the unbiassed righteousness of God. Certainly, if the chosen people were not spared, no sinners can hope to escape—except by the way of deliverance God has made through Christ.

Ver. 9.—*A unique event.* No doubt the intention of this prophecy is to express the horror of a judgment that is so exceptionally dreadful that history may be searched in vain for a precedent, and futurity will never behold its equal. But the very possibility of such an event suggests truths of wider significance. There are principles involved in this prediction which the modern reverence for the uniformity of law has led us to pass by too hastily.

I. THERE ARE UNIQUE FACTS AND EVENTS. Many things happen but once. They appear as novelties to surprise us, and they perish without issue. The world is full of singularity, individuality, and consequent variety. There is but one Niagara, one 'Iliad,' one Shakespeare. Innocence can be lost but once; the soul's fall is an event by itself, not to be compared with innumerable subsequent sins. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again"—not many times; for one act of regeneration suffices, though many experiences of forgiveness and purification may follow. "It is appointed unto men *once* to die." That dread Jordan has to be crossed but once. There is *one* Christ, and "none other Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12). "Christ was *once* offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. ix. 28).

II. THIS UNIQUENESS IS NOT CONTRARY TO THE UNIFORMITY OF LAW NOR TO THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD. 1. *Laws may converge to one result.* It might be according to regular laws that slowly gathering fires should suddenly burst out into one great final conflagration, or that, after vast ages of slow approach, two worlds should at length rush into violent collision. Such awful occurrences would be unique, but would involve no breach of uniformity. 2. *Varying circumstances will bring out new and singular* *effects.* With changeless laws we see changing events. The novel situation gives a new bearing to the old law. 3. *Human wills lead to new conditions.* We cannot abrogate any law of nature; but we can change the *venu* of the forces that surround us, as the steersman may alter the course of the ship by turning the rudder, although he cannot shift the direction of the wind by a point. If, then, God works through uniform laws and so proves to us his eternal constancy, he may yet send novel events without precedent and without following.

III. THIS UNIQUENESS OF FACTS AND EVENTS SHOULD WIDEN OUR CONCEPTION OF THE DIVINE ACTIVITY. 1. *It opens a door for miracles.* We cannot explain the cause and process of a miracle, but we may see that the most tremendous and unparalleled events might happen by some novel Divine action without any breach of natural laws, perhaps even through the operation of them. It will then be no less of God, for every act of nature and law is Divine. It will be above nature still, for the very conception of a miracle involves the thought of a specially purposed Divine action. Yet it may be in harmony with law and uniformity of method. 2. *This uniqueness warns us against a slavish adherence to the inductive method in theology.* It shows that here an induction can never be perfect. There may be facts left out of account. Therefore we cannot in all cases predict what God will do in the future by considering what he has done in the past. Assuredly he will be consistent with himself. But in entirely novel circumstances he may reveal entirely fresh forms of judgment or redemption. 3. *This uniqueness should strengthen our faith in special providence.* God does not feed his children on fixed rations. To some he may send exceptional chastisement, to others peculiar blessings. Justice does not imply equality; it means fairness. It would not be fair to give the same allowance to all. Here is scope for God's discriminating action, and therefore room for our individual prayer, faith, and hope.

Ver. 11.—*Diminishment.* The wicked nation is to be punished by being diminished (*i.e.* if we accept the Authorized Version, confirmed as it is by the majority of the Revisers).

I. POPULATION IS DIMINISHED. After the exile Palestine was thrown back almost to the condition of a wilderness, and lions came up from the desert to the once thickly peopled country (2 Kings xvii. 25). But even before the exile, war, famine, and plague reduced the population. Professor Seeley has shown that the chief cause of the overthrow of Rome by the Teutonic invaders was the great depopulating of Italy that took place under the empire. France is now threatened by decreasing population. The strength of a nation is in its people more than in its wealth.

II. GLORY IS DIMINISHED. Instead of the growth of honour and fame among the nations which was seen under Solomon, the Hebrew nation is now to shrink in importance, and so to fall into a position of insignificance.' This has happened to Greece, Rome, Spain, Holland. It may happen to England. We have no assurance that our proud British flag shall always float in glory. For our national sins God may permit it to be trampled in the mire.

III. POWER IS DIMINISHED. In regard to national movements this runs parallel with the previous thought, but in individuals it has a wider scope. The final punishment of sin is death. The prior penalties of sin are dying, *i.e.* a reduction of spiritual life, activity, and power. The once fruitful tree is now barren. He who was most successful in spiritual work now feels himself failing in all he attempts. His influence shrinks into insignificance. Sin has paralyzed his soul.

IV. THE VISION OF TRUTH IS DIMINISHED. Doubts succeed to the formerly growing knowledge of truth. The eyes of the soul become dim. God, who was once near, seems to withdraw himself into the darkness. The whole spiritual world, which had shone on the soul in full-orbed splendour, wanes and fades, and passes in gloom out of sight. The things unseen and eternal, which had been the very universe of existence, melt into vague shadows, and float out of consciousness like the summer clouds that disappear while we gaze at them.

V. THE JOY OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IS DIMINISHED. That joy can only be bright when the soul's life is fresh and strong. A dull apathy comes with the reduced spirituality. A very weariness succeeds to the old earnest gladness of service. The May-time of the soul has gone, and a November gloom has taken its place.

Conclusion. There is hope still. Diminution is not extinction. The tree is hewn down, but the stump may sprout (Isa. vi. 13). The Jews diminished by Nebuchadnezzar were restored under Cyrus. It is good in some way to feel diminution if *pride* is thereby also diminished. In the humility of shame the penitent may hope for his restoration to a new and more sound vigour by the merciful Saviour, who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Isa. xlii. 3).

Vers. 14, 15.—*The shame of moral shipwreck, and its lessons.* All the nations round about were to be witnesses of the shipwreck of Israel. The eyes of the world are upon the Church. No single Christian man can fall without his ruin being observed by many neighbours. The city set on a hill cannot be hid in its prosperity and splendour; much less will it be unnoticed when it is wrapped in flames, and even later when its melancholy ruins tell the world a tale of fallen greatness. The spectacle is striking; the thoughts which it suggests should be instructive. Let us note four things about this moral shipwreck.

I. It is culpable. The condition of Israel is to be "a reproach," *i.e.* blame will be attached to it. Nations must stand the chance of war, in which the most just and brave may suffer grievous loss; and yet history rarely, if ever, shows an instance of a people crushed and exterminated without any fault of its own. Moral corruption precedes total national overthrow. This was certainly the case with Israel, which fell in its wickedness, and was scattered for its sin. Misfortune may visit the Church, or an individual good man—such as Job—without guilt on the part of the sufferer, because a wholesome discipline or some other high and distant Divine purpose of love is to be wrought out through this means. But utter shipwreck of life does not come without moral delinquency. Unhappily, the reproach does not cease with the guilty person; it is laid against the cause of Christ, and it brings dishonour on his Name. This new "reproach of Christ" is the greatest hindrance to the progress of the gospel, and far more of a stumbling-block than the old shame of the cross.

II. It is shameful and degrading. The evil condition of the fallen nation will be "a taunt." Contempt will succeed to the old respect. The Church may expect to meet with opposition from the world, but she is indeed in an evil state when she has earned its contempt. To be despised wrongfully through the pride and superficial judgment of others is a fate which brave men can learn to endure. But to merit contempt is to lie in abject wretchedness. When Christian men fall from their pure profession, they sink into this most shocking ignominy. Even godless people can look down upon them, and taunt them with their high pretensions and boasted attainments and prized privileges.

III. It is instructive. The condition of the people will be "an instruction." As "no man liveth to himself," so also "no man dieth to himself." The ruin of nations is a lesson to the world. History is studded with beacon-warnings. The greatest nations have been defeated and destroyed. The prosperity of the Church in one age has been succeeded by corruption and shame in another. Men called "pillars" of the Church have fallen. People praised as "ornaments" of society have left tarnished reputations. Such sights not only warn us against pride and self-assurance; in searching for the explanation of them we may learn many a lesson as to the causes of success and failure, *e.g.* that secret sin leads to open shame, that past prosperity will not prevent present failure, that a good name is not an impregnable bulwark, that to forsake God is to court ruin.

IV. It is astonishing. Israel's state will be "an astonishment." 1. It *surprises the sufferers.* They never expected such a fall. Living in a fool's paradise, they spent their days at their ease till the crash came. Careless Christians are surprised at their own shipwreck. 2. It *surprises the onlookers.* It is contrary to expectation founded on previous observation and confident pretensions. Can the long-successful nation fall, and the people favoured of Heaven be abandoned to ruin? There will be many surprises in the future judgment, because ignorance of the awful power of moral law and of the just retribution of God destroys men's expectations of the punishment of sin. To some it will come with a shock of amazement, unless they now turn to the redemption of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Privileges abused.* Himself an exile, and far from the city which was the glory of his nation and the seat of the worship of his God, Ezekiel nevertheless felt keenly and bitterly the reproach which was coming upon the metropolis, the ruin which the sins of her kings and her citizens had brought upon her, the forsaking of her God, her abandonment to her foes. Yet he would not question the justice discernible in these calamities. Jerusalem was her own enemy and her own destruction.

I. THE PECULIAR AND PRE-EMINENT ADVANTAGES OF JERUSALEM. 1. *Political.* "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth," was Mount Zion. "In the midst of the nations, and the countries are round about her." The commanding position of the city of the great King strikes every beholder who looks at its walls and towers from the hill of Olivet, over the intervening valley. And whoever studies the map will recognize how central a station Jerusalem occupies: "Egypt to the south, Syria to the north, Assyria to the east, and the isles of the Gentiles in the Great Sea to the west." There were providential purposes in the selection of such a site, and in the consequent contact of the Jewish state, now with one neighbour and anon with another. What lessons Judah might learn from such associations! 2. *Religious.* In this regard, what nation of antiquity could compare with the Hebrew people? In Jewry God was known; his Name was great in Israel. God dealt not so with any people. In Jerusalem stood the temple, where sacrifices were offered and festivals were celebrated. Here lived and ministered the priests, who maintained the visible intercourse between God and man; the prophets, who now and again spoke as the representatives of Jehovah, especially in critical times, and whose words were often as the fire, and as the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces; the scribes, whose profession it was to preserve and to expound the Law of God for the enlightenment and admonition of the people. Signal were the privileges enjoyed by Jerusalem, and by the people who gloried in Jerusalem as their metropolis.

II. THE ABUSE OF PRIVILEGES WITH WHICH JERUSALEM WAS CHARGEABLE. By his prophet the Lord brought home this fault to the guilty nation. Jerusalem is charged: 1. With rejection of God and of his judgments. 2. With rebellion in doing wickedness. 3. With error from God's ways. The language is strong, but not too strong for the case, for the circumstances. The Eternal was Israel's King; and his lawful subjects, though distinguished by his favour and exalted to honour by his clemency and condescension, had turned against the Sovereign to whom they owed everything that they possessed and gloried in. In the circumstances, reprobation could not be too severe.

III. COMPARISON WITH OTHER CITIES AND OTHER NATIONS ENHANCED THE GUILT OF JERUSALEM. 1. Their privileges had been inferior in kind and fewer in number. Politically, indeed, they were in several instances great; but religiously they stood upon a distinctly lower level than did the Jews. 2. Their guilt was not so enormous. These nations round about sinned indeed, but they sinned against the light of nature, not against the clearer light of revelation. They did not break the written Law, for they did not possess it; they did not blaspheme Jehovah, for they knew not his Name; they did not despise his prophets, for the prophets were not sent to them. All these comparisons serve to aggravate the heinous guilt of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. When attention is given to the pre-eminent position of Jerusalem in comparison with surrounding cities and countries, the justice of the denunciations of the prophets is unquestionable.

> "Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
> Exalted once on high,
> Thou favoured home of God on earth,
> Thou heaven beneath the sky!"

IV. GOD'S OBSERVATION OF JERUSALEM'S SIN AND FOLLY, AND HIS PURPOSES OF RETRIBUTION. 1. The Lord represents himself as pained by the contempt with which Jerusalem has treated his distinguishing mercy and favour. 2. He is displeased with those who have shown so little appreciation of all that he has done for their well-being. 3. He threatens judgments upon the disobedient, rebellious, and impenitent.—T.

Ver. 8.—*Divine antagonism.* That is a lawless state of society in which every man's hand is against his neighbour. Yet no observer of human life is insensible to the prevalence of enmity, rivalry, opposition of various kinds, among all communities of men. "There are many adversaries" is a complaint which every man has made in his time. Men become accustomed to this, and regard it as a natural accompaniment of social life. But it is something very different when the almighty and righteous Lord addresses a man or a community, and says, "Behold I, even I, am against thee."

I. THE STRANGENESS AND WONDER OF THIS ATTITUDE. That the heathen, who construct the character of their gods upon the lines of their own character, should depict them as hostile, seems natural enough. But that enlightened theists should be surprised at such a representation as that of the text, is a consequence of the conceptions which reason and revelation alike have taught them to form of God. Is not God on our side? Does he not represent himself as favourable to the sons of men—using his power for their protection, their deliverance, their aid? How, then, can a merciful and benevolent God be in any sense *against* us?

II. THE EXPLANATION AND REASONABLENESS OF THIS ATTITUDE. It is clear that the Creator and Lord of all cannot be expected to alter the principles of his government in order to accommodate himself to the follies and the caprices of his creatures. If a man throws himself into mid-ocean, or into the crater of a burning volcano, nature is against him, and he must perish. If a man by his own action contracts disease, he must suffer. Gravitation is not to be suspended because a foolhardy fanatic flings himself from a tower. Nor are chemical laws to be abolished because one ignorantly swallows poison. In all such cases, we may say with reverence, "God is against those who act in such and such a manner." Similarly in the moral realm. The spiritual universe is so constituted that men cannot violate moral law without suffering, cannot defy God with impunity. Those who sin must sooner or later learn the fact, which no reasoning of theirs can affect, that God is against them.

III. THE IMMEDIATE PURPOSE OF THIS ATTITUDE. It is evident that, if all things were made easy and pleasant for the sinner, if there were no check and no chastisement for his sin, such an arrangement would not be for the sinner's real good. On the contrary, he would be encouraged to persevere in his evil courses. But the sinner, finding that God is against him, is in many cases by this very fact led to consider his ways. His experience "gives him pause." There follows from this consciousness of punishment the state of mind known as "conviction of sin," and conviction of sin may lead to repentance and to submission. Finding that, by setting himself against God, the sinner sets God against him, he may be led to submission; he may ask himself, "Why should I not have God with me instead of against me?" The beginning of the process may partake of a selfish regard for his own interests, but he may be led on to see something better than this—to discern the justice, the propriety, the moral excellence of subjection to and harmony with the will which ever accords with perfect righteousness, wisdom, and love.

IV. THE ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCE AND RESULT OF THIS ATTITUDE. No one who reflects upon the character of the God of infinite justice and benevolence can suppose that he can take a pleasure in a posture of antagonism and hostility against anything that he has made, far less against man, whom he created in his own likeness, to show forth his own glory. His aim is ever to bring his intelligent and voluntary creatures into harmony with his own nature; to recover and restore, not to overwhelm with destruction; to bring his children to exclaim, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"—T.

Vers. 14, 15.—*A reproach and a lesson.* The symbolical prediction recorded in this chapter was evidently intended to convey to the minds of the Jews the Divine purpose that their city should be destroyed, and their nation dispersed and politically extinguished. A third part should perish by pestilence and famine, a third part should be slain, and the remaining third part should be scattered throughout the earth. So far, all seems vengeance. There appears, for the present, no ray of light to irradiate the gloom, *i.e.* so far as the once favoured and now depressed and threatened Hebrew
But, however calamity may affect the Jews, the prophet was not be in vain with respect to neighbouring nations. They

should learn the lesson, whether the scourged and scattered seed of Jacob would hear or forbear. This purpose, at least, the fate of Jerusalem and the calamities of the Jews in their exile and dispersion should not fail to accomplish; a lesson should be taught to the nations of the earth concerning the sinfulness of sin and the justice and truth of God, which should not be forgotten down to the end of time.

I. THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM WAS DESIGNED TO BE A REPROACH AND A TAUNT, AND THUS AN EXHIBITION TO ALL THE NATIONS OF THE DIVINE JUSTICE. The attribute of justice has its punitive side; and this was displayed in the fate of the proud and once highly favoured city. If this purpose was answered by the fall of Jerusalem and the calamities which followed, it may surely be acknowledged that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, which followed upon the rejection of the Divine Messiah, and the dispersion of the Jews during the following centuries of history, have constituted a lesson of similar import for the warning of mankind.

II. THE SAME EVENT WAS AN INSTRUCTION AND AN ASTONISHMENT, AND THUS AN INCULCATION UPON THE NATIONS OF THE DIVINE LAW AND AUTHORITY. Justice has its distributive as well as its corrective side. Not only is Law to be vindicated by the sanction of penalty inflicted upon the disobedient; the excellence and glory of the Law has to be displayed as the proper rule for the moral guidance and government of mankind. Thus the nations were not only to wonder and to tremble, when they beheld the just indignation of outraged Divine authority manifest itself in a city's siege, capture, and subjection; they were to learn to inquire into the Law which had been broken, the authority which had been defied. There is an aspect of construction, as well as an aspect of destruction, in the government of the world. It is the part of wisdom, not merely to recognize the power which avenges infraction of Divine decrees, but to admire the holy Law, to submit to the righteous Lawgiver, to forsake evil, and to do good.—T.

Vers. 1—4.—*The prophetic office involves self-sacrifice.* The prophet in every age has to be *himself a sign*. It is not so much what he *says*, not so much what he *does*, but what he *is*, that impresses others. In this enterprise character is everything. Ezekiel was a servant of God to the very core. He completely identified himself with the nation. *Its* misery became *his* misery. Thus he became a type and symbol of the Saviour; and, in his measure, suffered vicariously for the people.

I. THE SURRENDER OF PERSONAL BEAUTY A SIGN OF NATIONAL DEGRADATION. The hair and beard are man's natural adornments. To be shorn of these, in earlier times, was a signal mark of dishonour. No greater contempt could the King of Ammon have cast upon King David, than to despoil his ambassadors of their beards. But the ornaments of nature may well be sacrificed for moral advantages. It is an act of genuine wisdom to make the body servant to the soul. If bodily mortifications will deepen our sense of sin, sever the roots of pride and worldliness, or impress others with our zeal for righteousness, it is a wise expenditure. To save men from sin, it is worth while to sacrifice much that we hold dear.

II. THE SENSE OF GRIEF WAS DEEPENED BY THE DESTINATION OF HIS HAIR. Every hair had been the workmanship of God, and all the hairs of his head had been numbered by God. They were not lightly to be sacrificed. Every hair was to be a sermon. It declared that God was willing to sacrifice what was of lesser value, if thereby he could save what was incomparably more precious. The various destinations of the prophet's hair were pregnant with moral significance. We cannot too much admire the condescension of God in employing such simple methods for instructing and impressing men. If, to any modern readers, these methods should seem childish, we can only say that other methods would have missed the end. The methods by which God seeks to educate and bless men now may equally seem condescensions to other races of intelligent life. To fire, to the sword, to dispersion, was the bulk of the nation doomed!

III. THE ACCURATE ALLOTMENT OF RIGHTEOUS PENALTY WAS FORESHADOWED. Even amid the hurly-burly of war, there is no miscarriage of Divine justice. With an invisible shield, God covers, in the day of battle, *those* whom he designs to save. Those who are destined for the flame will not perish by the sword, and those who may escape from Nebuchadnezzar's hand do not escape from the hand of Almighty justice. The eye of man may not be keen enough to detect the exact admeasurements of God's penalties; this matters not. But a clearer eye might discern that there was an accurate weighing-out of desert to unrighteousness. In the invisible hand of God there is a balance exquisitely true, absolutely exact; and the day will yet dawn when human intelligence having developed, and human conscience being quickened in its action, men will join in saying, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.'

IV. Present protection does not secure final safety. The prophet was enjoined to deal in a different manner with a few of these hairs. They were to be bound carefully in the skirt of his robe. This would be understood by all to imply that, in the midst of judgment, God would not forget mercy. A remnant should be spared. Yet this was only a temporary and an external privilege. So long as the hearts of the people remained rebellious and obdurate, deliverance was impossible. Prosperity cannot last that does not spring from the root of righteousness. To be spared in the day of general disaster, and then to be overtaken by a worse calamity, is tenfold more grievous. This is equivalent to being first lifted up and then thrown down. Yet the *intention* was to bless. God will not neglect any possibility of doing good to men. If there be on our part the least disposition to receive, there is on his part the readiest disposition to give. But take heed! To spare *now* does not secure, of necessity, *final* salvation!—D.

Vers. 5—10.—*Abused privilege produces condign punishment.* This doctrine is repeated and emphasized in myriad forms. It is written, not in sand, but on rock, and written with a pen of steel. If the men of England do not read this lesson, the reason is evident—they are wantonly blind.

I. We have here an instance of eminent privilege. Jerusalem was placed in a most central position. What the heart is to the body, what the sun is to the solar system, Palestine was among ancient empires. Hers was special advantage for getting good and for doing good. She was within easy reach of the civilization of Egypt, the martial power of Babylon, the science and art of Greece, the commercial enterprise of Phœnicia, the law-making might of Rome. On every side there were patterns to be imitated, follies to be avoided. Of all the intellectual, moral, and commercial life of primitive man, the Jews occupied a central place. Intercourse between the distant nations passed, in large measure, through Palestine. Hence she had splendid opportunities for diffusing the light of true religion far and wide. Inquirers after God ought to have found at Jerusalem a solution of all their doubts.

II. Privilege entails responsibility. Every man lives under the wise and righteous government of God, and every possession he holds he holds *in trust.* He is a steward, who holds and uses his Master's goods. In proportion to the good he enjoys is the service he is required to render. For every faculty of body and of mind, for every special advantage and gift, he is accountable to his Maker. God has never intended that any donation of his should terminate in the man himself. We *receive* in order that we may *give.* The wealthy man has more service to render than the poor man. The sage has more to account for than the fool. A man is not in the same position morally at the close of the sabbath as at the dawn. He *must,* in the nature of things, be either better or worse for every advantage he obtains. The tree that does not bear good fruit is something worse than useless. Each man adds something to the piety, or to the impiety, of the age. As God had dowered the Hebrews with special privilege, he rightly expected from them fruitful service.

III. Responsibility abused creates deadly sin. The sin of the Hebrews was inexcusable. They rebelled against the light—the light of nature, the light of conscience, the light of supernatural revelation. 1. *There was base neglect.* God had made known to them his infallible wisdom; but they preferred their own foolishness. God had deigned to weigh difficult matters for them, and to give them the benefit of his superior judgment; but they refused to follow. They would, at all risks, fling off restraint, and yield to none but *self.* 2. *There was positive perversion of God's goodness.* They changed his judgments into wickedness. They made even religious ordinances an occasion of sin. They transmuted truth into falsehood, the house of prayer into a den of thieves. Better, far better, not to have the sabbath, than to profane its sacred hours. Better not to have a message of kindness than to treat it with scorn

3. *Their guilt was extraordinary.* It exceeded *that* of the nations round about them. While they enjoyed special restraints, they not only went to the same lengths of profane idolatry as other nations, they went beyond them! Although the *fact* of one spiritual Deity was clearly made known among them, yet they borrowed the idol-deities of every adjacent nation, until their Reprover could declare, "According to the number of thy cities are thy idols, O Israel!" 4. *Public warnings were lost upon them.* That God had spoken by the mouth of prophets was *clear*, because their predictions had come to pass. That God was uniformly faithful in maintaining his Word, no sane mind could question. His judgments had fallen, like hail, upon all the surrounding empires, and manifestly, because of idolatry; therefore nothing short of sheer insensibility of mind prevented their taking heed. What more could God do for them, to bring them to repentance, than he had done? Every mouth is silent. Their guilt had come to a head, had reached a final climax.

IV. Special guilt bears its proper fruitage of punishment. It is not possible that anything can sever the link between sin and punishment. That link has been wrought by Eternal Justice. 1. *This punishment should manifestly proceed from God.* "They shall know that I the Lord have spoken it," etc. Too often men regard their sufferings as chance effects, misfortunes that have come about in a haphazard way. Not so here. Even those who would not believe that God had done them former kindness, and sent them faithful monitors—even these shall be compelled to feel that this punishment is from God. It shall be so public, so severe, so intimately connected with the sin, so precisely in accordance with prophetic warning, that God shall at length be acknowledged as the righteous Author. So self-willed are some children that nothing but the rod will induce submission. 2. *This retribution shall be public.* Though the sin be done in secret, the chastisement shall be public. In every age, impartial justice has sought the fullest light for its deeds. Among the ancients, law was administered, and wisely so, in the gate. God has nothing to conceal. To the extent that his creatures have capacity to understand, he is prepared to reveal. It is his intention that the universe shall behold the retributions of guilt and be awed thereby. The destruction of one may thus turn to the salvation of many. 3. *This punishment shall be extremely severe.* "I will do in thee that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like," etc. Yet, though severe, it was not too severe. It was not more severe than the case required. The cause of justice would not have been satisfied with less. When God holds the scales, punishment will be exact; it will neither be too great nor too lenient. Guilt is proportionate to previous advantage, and retribution is in precise measure with guilt. If we prove unfaithful, the higher we have been lifted up by acts of kindness, the deeper will be our fall. Capernaum and Bethsaida deserve a heavier sentence than Tyre and Sidon. "There are first that shall be last." 4. *The guilty are to be the executors of their own fate.* "The fathers shall eat the sons . . . and the sons shall eat their fathers." The famine shall press sore; but this is not the worst feature in the doom. Natural affection shall so decay that the father will not shrink from slaying his own boy, and feeding on the human flesh. Sons shall be so far lost to filial reverence that they will do the like to their fathers. When once love to our heavenly Father is dead, love to our natural kin soon decays. Man, cut off from God, becomes a monster. The beasts of the field never sink so low as man does in his last depravity. It is an impressive fact that guilty men often execute God's judgments upon themselves, while yet they know it not. A heavenly glory emanates from the cross of Jesus Christ, but eternal shame encircles for ever the gallows of Judas.—D.

Vers. 11—17.—*The Divine Remonstrator.* It is clear as daylight that the root-sin of the Jews was unbelief. Although the prophets of Jehovah brought incontestible evidence that they spake in God's Name, and spake only words of truth, the people closed their ears, and treated the warning with contempt. They were in love with sin, and were resolved not to part from it. Proofs that God spake through the lips of these prophets were abundant.

I. There was the repeated assertion of honest men that God spake by them. Ezekiel was known to be a true man. It was known that he had no private interests to serve. It was acknowledged that in all the relations of human life he was honourable and faithful. He was known to be a devout man, a man of prayer. What other explanation, therefore, could men put upon his earnest, heart-stirring appeals than that God spake by him? If his reproof of sin was *true*, then God spake through him. If he made known the might and righteousness of Jehovah, Jehovah spake through him. If his purpose was to deter from sin and induce repentance, it was evident to every honest mind that it was true, as Ezekiel said, "I the Lord have spoken it!"

II. THE PARTICULARIZATION OF COMING JUDGMENTS PROVED THAT THE MESSENGER SPAKE IN GOD'S NAME. The retribution was not announced in vague, general terms. There was revealed a wise discrimination in dealing out judgment to wrong-doers. "A third part shall die with the pestilence;" "A third part shall fall by the sword;" "I will scatter a third part into all the winds." Severe as the threatening was, there was nothing improbable or unnatural in it. Pestilence was a common disaster, and if a hundred families, now and again, were carried off by its virulence, why may not a third of the nation? So with famine; so with the sword. In a time of severe drought, famine and pestilence often went hand-in-hand. The flower of the nation being destroyed, some martial neighbour would gladly seize the opportunity for invasion. Resistance would end in terrible defeat; and, for the residue, banishment was decreed. Both man and nature are the servants of God; often are they combined to execute his will. If we escape one minister of vengeance, it is only to be overtaken by another.

III. THE REVEALED PURPOSE OF THE RETRIBUTION WAS TO SATISFY GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS. "Then shall mine anger be comforted." God accommodates himself, in his speech, to the manners of men. There can be no rest for him so long as guilt stalks abroad unpunished. There is disturbance in his moral universe. There is pain in every loyal angel's breast. Fallen spirits are encouraged in their rebellion. The moral force of law is weakened. His own veracity is at stake while sin is unpunished. Therefore, to maintain the interests of universal justice, to maintain in tranquillity his own throne, to uphold order everywhere, sin must be stamped out. There is disease in the system, and no rest can be enjoyed until health be restored. The principles and attributes of God's nature can only then settle into complete harmony when sin is chastised.

IV. THE EVIDENT INTENTION OF THE REMONSTRANCE PROVED THAT IT WAS FROM GOD. "I the Lord have spoken it." No sane mind could doubt that the motive of such repeated remonstrance was love—wise and far-reaching love. The ancient Greeks had a proverb, "The gods have feet of wool." They were supposed to overtake men noiselessly and without warning. Not so Jehovah. In his most severe retributions kindness is yet manifest. Faithful expostulation and tearful warning precede final destruction. The good of his creatures is a superlative motive in his bosom—a motive that reigns side by side with the maintenance of law. If the good of the sinner himself be hopeless, then the good of others is sought. These earnest pleadings with men declare most emphatically his condescension, his patience, his self-sacrificing love. This is not after the manner of men. If offenders against God would only reflect, they would confess that such remonstrance was a remonstrance of eternal Love—the counsel of the living God.—D.

Vers. 1—4.—*The sword of the Divine judgment.* "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp knife, take thee a barber's razor," etc. In this paragraph the prophet represents both Jehovah and the people. In taking the sharp sword he represents the former; and in having his hair shaved off, the latter. Notice—

I. THE EXERCISE OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT. "And thou, son of man, take thee a sharp sword, as a barber's razor thou shalt take it, and cause it to pass upon thy head and upon thy beard." Here is a picture of the judgment of God upon his sinful people (cf. Deut. xxxii. 41, "If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me"). When God's will has long been set at nought by any people, and his forbearance has long been exercised towards them, and they still persist in rebellion against him, he will arise to the exercise of judgment upon them. There are stern aspects of the Divine character, which we are sometimes in danger of overlooking.

God is good and kind; he is also just and terrible. We may see this in nature. We have the beautiful and the beneficent—the warm and brilliant sun, genial airs, lovely flowers, enchanting scenes, and bountiful harvests. We have also the dreary and the destructive—wintry skies, dreadful tempests, devastating floods, engulfing earthquakes, and depopulating famines. If we turn to the providence of God, here also we discover evidences not only of his goodness, but also of his severity. The sword of Divine justice has sharply smitten corrupt nations. Inveterate moral depravity has been quickly succeeded by national ruin. History abounds in examples of the stern exercise of the judgment of God. And his judgments are awful and irresistible. He executes them with a sharp sword. "Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" "Who can stand before his indignation?" etc. (Nah. i. 6; Rom. ii. 2—11).

II. THE SUBJECTS OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT. The judgments of the text were to be inflicted upon the house of Israel. The head of the prophet which was to be shaved probably represents Jerusalem; and the hair certainly represents those of the people who yet remained in their own land. Upon them the avenging hand of God was about to descend. If the people of God become obstinate in rebellion against him, he will not fail to send against them the sword of punishment. "If his children forsake my Law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes" (Ps. lxxxix. 30—32). When those who have been exalted in privileges become persistent in wickedness, their exaltation, so far from protecting them from punishment, renders their fall the greater and the doom the more terrible (cf. Matt. xi. 20—24). Religious privileges should prove an incentive and aid to holiness of character and usefulness of life, and not an encouragement to presumption and sin.

III. THE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENT. "Then take thee balances to weigh, and divide the hair. Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city," etc. The balances to weigh symbolize the righteousness with which the punishment is allotted (cf. Isa. xxviii. 17). And as to the three portions into which the hair was divided, the third part which was to be burnt in the midst of the city represents those who perished in Jerusalem during the siege. In those days famine and pestilence claimed many for their prey (ver. 12). The second third part, which was to be smitten about by the prophet with the sword, represents those who were slain in fight during the siege, or in the endeavour to escape when the city was taken (Jer. lii. 5—11). And the last third part, which was to be scattered to the wind, represents those who, after Jerusalem was taken, were dispersed in foreign lands; some of them fled and escaped, and many others were taken as captives by the Chaldeans. Of this part some are represented by a few hairs bound in the skirts of the prophet's garment. These are they who were left in the land by their conquerors. "Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land for vine-dressers and for husbandmen" (Jer. lii. 16). Over these the King of Babylon made Gedaliah governor. But even of this poor remnant some were to be "cast into the midst of the fire;" *i.e.* they had yet to pass through severe trials; they had not yet done with the judgment of the Lord. The fulfilment of this is recorded in Jer. xl.—xliii.; and is thus briefly stated by Dr. Milman: "The miserable remnant of the people were placed under the command of Gedaliah, as a pasha of the great Assyrian monarch; the seat of government was fixed at Mizpeh. Yet ambition could look with envy even on this eminence. Gedaliah was assassinated by Ishmael, a man of royal blood. Johanan attempted to avenge his death. Ishmael, discomfited, took refuge with the Ammonites; but Johanan and the rest of the Jews, apprehensive lest they should be called in question for the murder of Gedaliah, fled to Egypt, and carried Jeremiah with them." And even they were doomed to sufferings and shame and death (Jer. xliv. 11—14). Now, in this distribution of punishment the Lord acted righteously. The hair was weighed; the triple division was accurately made; and the appropriate retribution assigned to each portion. We cannot always discover the equitableness of the Divine judgments in individual cases. But let us remember that there is much of suffering in this world which is not of the character of judgment or punishment; and in this the good often share as largely, or even more largely, than the wicked. There is also a suffering with others and for others; and in this Christians, like their great Lord and

Exemplar, deeply participate. And if there be painful retributions, which involve saint and sinner in one common outward doom, let us give due weight to the precious fact that such outward suffering comes to them with essentially different spiritual significance. And for the rest, we rejoice that though "clouds and darkness are round about the Lord, righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." And in the distribution of awards in the great future, God "will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. ii. 6; cf. Matt. xvi. 27; Luke xii. 47, 48; 2 Cor. v. 10).—W. J.

Vers. 5—17.—*Pre-eminent privilege, perversity, and punishment.* "Thus saith the Lord God; This is Jerusalem," etc. In these and some succeeding verses we have the interpretation of the symbolism of the previous part of the chapter; or "an authoritative commentary on the preceding allegory." The text presents to our notice—

I. A POSITION OF PRE-EMINENT PRIVILEGE. "Thus saith the Lord God; This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her." The position here stated may be viewed: 1. *Geographically.* We are not to interpret this as asserting that Jerusalem was situated in the centre of the earth. But Palestine really occupied "a central position with regard to that group, or those groups, of nations which to it practically constituted the world." On the north of it was Syria, on the south Egypt, on the east Assyria, on the west Europe. "It stood midway between the two great seats of ancient empire, Babylon and Egypt." And, as Fairbairn observes, "viewing the world as it existed at the time of Israel's settlement in Canaan, and for a thousand years afterwards, we believe it would be impossible to fix upon a single region so admirably fitted, at once to serve as a suitable dwelling-place for such a people, and to enable them, as from a central and well-chosen vantage-ground, to act with success upon the heathenism of the world." 2. *Religiously.* The Israelites were placed in the midst of the nations, as in a position of honour by their possession of higher and fuller religious privileges. They had been blessed with more illustrious men than other nations; mightier and more wonderful deeds had been done for them than for any other people; a clearer and brighter revelation of God had been given to them; a purer and nobler worship had been instituted amongst them. 3. *Influentially.* The Israelites had been thus favoured and stationed, in order that they might be a blessing to other nations. Not selfishly were they to enjoy their privileges, but for the benefit of others. Their light was to shine for the illumination of other peoples. They were specially blessed, that others might be blessed through them. With unmistakable clearness is this expressed in the sixty-seventh psalm: "God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; that thy way may be known upon earth," etc. (cf. Deut. iv. 5—8; John iv. 22). In like manner, Christians are called to be "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world;" and they are exhorted, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 13—16; cf. 1 Pet. ii. 9).

II. SINS OF PRE-EMINENT WICKEDNESS. 1. *Their rejection of God's commands.* "She hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations," etc. (vers. 6, 7). The word "judgment" is here equivalent to "commands" or "ordinances." Two degrees of rebellion against the Divine will are clearly indicated. (1) Disobedience of Divine commands. "They have refused my judgments and my statutes, they have not walked in them. . . . Ye have not walked in my statutes, neither have kept my judgments." (2) Hostility to the Divine commands. "She hath changed my judgments into wickedness" is not an accurate translation. Hengstenberg renders it, "She opposed my judgments worse than the heathen;" and Schröder, "She quarrelled with my judgments more wickedly than the (heathen) nations." The spirit of disobedience had grown daring and defiant. The seventh verse presents the same idea: "Ye multiplied more than the nations that are round about you." Here also the translation is incorrect. Hengstenberg, "Ye raged more than the heathen who are round about you." There is a reference to Ps. ii. 1, "Why do the heathen rage?" The chosen people had grown more fierce in their rebellion against God, even than the heathen nations. 2. *Their desecration of God's sanctuary.* "Thou hast defiled my sanctuary with all thy detestable things, and with all thine abominations" (ver. 11). Heathen idols, altars, and ceremonies had been introduced into the temple and worship of the Lord Jehovah. We have some account of these abominations in ch. viii. and 2 Kings xvi. 10—18; xxiii. 4—14. The favoured Israelites had corrupted their highest and holiest things. 3. *Their exceeding even the heathen in wickedness.* "She quarrelled with my judgments more wickedly than the (heathen) nations," etc. (ver. 6); "Ye raged more than the (heathen) nations which are round about you" (ver. 7). In two ways the house of Israel had exceeded the heathen in wickedness. (1) Because they sinned against greater and clearer light. The heathen had the light of conscience, "the law written in their hearts" (Rom. ii. 14, 15); but Israel had the Law in statutes and ordinances. The will of God had been made known to them by lawgiver and seer, by poet and prophet. They sinned against the Law of God, both as spoken within themselves and as proclaimed by inspired men. (2) Because their standard of moral attainment was lower than that of the heathen. "Neither have ye done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you." The charge conveyed in these words seems to be "that the Israelites have not even been as faithful to their one true God as the nations have been to their false gods." The heathen clung to their worthless idols, while Israel forsook the living God, who had so mightily wrought for them and so richly blessed them (cf. Jer. ii. 11—13). Thus mournfully had the exalted people fallen; thus wickedly had the highly favoured people rebelled against their gracious Lord God.

III. PUNISHMENT OF PRE-EMINENT SEVERITY. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations," etc. 1. *The great Agent in this punishment.* Jehovah represents himself as inflicting every form of the dread judgment upon his sinful people. From ver. 8 unto the end of the chapter, every verse contains a distinct statement showing that the punishments were to proceed from him. He is the great Agent throughout. The Chaldeans were but instruments unconsciously working out his purposes. How inexpressibly terrible is it when the Lord God declares, "I, even I, am against thee"! When he is against any one, what can profit such a one? When he makes bare his arm for judgment, who can stand against its strokes? 2. *The nature of this punishment.* It takes three chief forms. (1) Famine. "A third part of thee shall die with the pestilence, and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of thee" (vers. 12. 16, 17). And the famine was to be of dread severity, bringing in pestilence and leading to the most horrible cannibalism (ver. 10). It is to be feared that such revolting actions were not infrequent in the sieges of antiquity (cf. Lev. xxvi. 29; Deut. xxviii. 53; 2 Kings vi. 28, 29; Jer. xix. 9; Lam. ii. 20). (2) Sword. "A third part shall fall by the sword round about thee" (cf. ver. 2; Jer. xv. 2, 3). (3) Dispersion. "And I will scatter a third part into all the winds." The majority were carried captives into Chaldea; some were "scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of" the Persian empire (Esth. iii. 8; ix. 2); and others went down into Egypt (Jer. xliii. 4—7). And even when thus scattered, it is said of them, "And I will draw out a sword after them," indicating that even in the country of their exile the Divine judgments would still afflict them. 3. *The retributionary character of this punishment.* We have seen (in vers. 6, 7) how resolutely the Israelites had set themselves against the Lord God: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, am against thee." He had set them "in the midst of the nations," to be an example unto them of his righteousness and kindness; they had utterly failed in this respect; therefore he "will execute judgments in the midst of them in the sight of the nations," and they shall be an example of his righteous retributions. Again, they had exceeded the heathen in wickedness, and he would bring upon them judgments exceeding in their severity anything before or after (cf. ver. 9; Matt. xxiv. 21). This retributionary character of the Divine dealings is affirmed by the prophets (Isa. iii. 10, 11), by our Lord (Matt. x. 32, 33), and by St. Paul (Gal. vi. 7, 8; 2 Tim. ii. 12). 4. *The exemplary aspect of this punishment.* "I will make thee waste, and a reproach among the nations that are round about thee, in the sight of all that pass by," etc. (vers. 14, 15). The design of the Lord in placing his people in the land which he gave unto them was that they should be patterns of excellence to the neighbouring nations; too often they had been the opposite of this; for this reason he would make them, as the bearers of his wrath, a warning (Authorized Version, "instruction") to those nations. They would not be patterns, therefore they shall be beacons. If they who have extraordinary privileges fail to walk in a manner worthy of them, God will probably make them a warning to less-favoured peoples, by reason of the just judgments which overtake them. The punishment which some suffer because of their sins should powerfully admonish others that they sin not. 5. *The awful certainty of the punishment.* This is stated with great impressiveness. "As I live, saith the Lord God; Surely, because thou hast defiled my sanctuary," etc. (ver. 11). And at the close of the dread announcements of this chapter, we have the solemn asseveration, "I the Lord have spoken it." Thus "God subscribes the threatening with the royal monogram of his Name." By his own existence, and his own Word, the Lord binds himself to fulfil the awful declarations of this chapter. Nothing is more certain than this, that the sinner, unless he forsake his sins, must receive the righteous retribution of them. God's Word declares this; his holiness necessitates it, and human experience confirms it.

Conclusion. Our subject is charged with solemn admonition to those who have great privileges. Our advantages involve corresponding obligations; and unless they are faithfully improved, they will be to us the occasion of terrible condemnation (cf. Matt. xi. 20—24; Luke xii. 47, 48).—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VI.

Vers. 2, 3.—Set thy face toward the mountains, etc. The formula is eminently characteristic of Ezekiel. We have had it with a different verb in the Hebrew, in ch. iv. 3. It will meet us again in ch. xx. 46; xxi. 2; xxv. 2; xxviii. 21; xxix. 2; xxxv. 2; xxxviii. 2. In this case it probably implied an outward act, like that of Daniel, when he, with a very different purpose, looked towards Jerusalem (Dan. vi. 10). In contrast with the widespread plains of Mesopotamia in which Ezekiel found himself, this was the chief characteristic of the land which he had left. The mountains represent the whole country, including the rivers (Revised Version, here and throughout, renders the Hebrew "water-courses," to distinguish it from the "river" (*nahar*) of ch. i. 1, 3, *et al.*, and the "river" (*nachal*) of ch. xlvii. 5. Its strict meaning is that of a "ravine" or "gorge," the *wady* of modern Arabic, through which a stream rushes in the winter, but is dried up in the summer). All the localities are named as having been alike polluted by the worship of idols. For *mountains and hills* as the scenes of such worship, see Deut. xii. 2; 2 Kings xvii. 10, 11; Jer. ii. 20; iii. 6; Hos. iv. 13; for the ravines and valleys, 2 Kings xxiii. 10 and Jer. vii. 31 (the Valley of Hinnom); and more generally, Isa. lvii. 5, 6. The same combination meets us in ch. xxxv. 8; xxxvi. 4, 6. In his address to the mountains, Ezekiel follows in the footsteps of Micah vi. 2. **I will destroy your high places.** The words point to the most persistent, though not the worst, of all the idolatries by which the worship of Jehovah as the God of Israel had been overshadowed. The words of Ezekiel are identical with those of Lev. xxvi. 30. The Bamoth, or high places, of Baal, are mentioned in Numb. xxii. 41 and Josh. xiii. 17, and are probably identical with the high places of Arnon in Numb. xxi. 28. There they are named only incidentally, not in the way of prohibition or condemnation. So, in like manner, in Deut. xxxii. 13 and xxxiii. 29, if the technical sense exists at all, it is referred to only as included in the triumph of the worship of Jehovah over the hill-fortresses as the sanctuaries of other gods. The absence of the word from the Book of Judges is difficult to explain, as it was precisely in that period of the history of Israel, irregular and unsettled, that we should have expected to find the people adopting the cultus of their neighbours. A probable solution of the problem is that, so long as the tabernacle and the ark were at Shiloh, that was so pre-eminently the centre of the worship of Jehovah, that the people were not tempted to forsake it, or to set up the worship upon the high places side by side with it. When, after the capture of the ark, Shiloh was a deserted sanctuary, we meet for the first time with the worship of the high places, not as a thing forbidden, but as sanctioned by the presence of Samuel, as the judge and prophet of the people (1 Sam. ix. 12—14; x. 5), the "high place" in the last passage being, apparently, the same as "the hill of God." In 2 Sam. i. 19, possibly from the Book of Jashar, we have the older, less technical sense of Deut. xxxii. 12 and xxxiii. 19. It would seem, accordingly, as if Samuel had acted on a policy like that of the counsel which Gregory I. gave Augustine. He found the worship of the high places adopted by the Israelites from the neighbouring nations. He sought to turn them to the worship of Jehovah. So the writer of 1 Kings iii. 2 records the fact that "the people sacrificed in high places," because as yet, though the ark had been brought to Jerusalem, "there was no house built unto the Name of Jehovah until those days," and that Solomon himself also "sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places." At the chief of these, the great high place of Gibeon, Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings, and had the memorable vision in which he made choice of wisdom rather than length of days, or riches and honour, returning from it, as though the cultus of the two places stood nearly on an equal footing, to offer other burnt offerings before the ark of God at Jerusalem (1 Kings iii. 3—15). With the erection of the temple the state of things was, in some measure, altered, and the temple was the one legitimate sanctuary. When the ten tribes revolted under Jeroboam, they were, of course, cut off from the temple services, and the king accordingly, besides the calves at Bethel and Dan, set up high places, with priests not of the sons of Aaron, in the cities of Samaria (1 Kings xii. 31; xiii. 32). From that time forward the high places are always mentioned by both historians and prophets in a tone of condemnation, whether they were in Israel or Judah (1 Kings xiv. 4), but they had become so deeply rooted in the reverence of the people that even the better kings of Judah, who warred against open idolatry, like Asa (1 Kings xv. 14), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 43), Jehoash (2 Kings xii. 3), Amaziah (2 Kings xiv. 4), Azariah (2 Kings xv. 4), left them undisturbed; while in the history of the northern kingdom the cultus of the Bamoth reigned paramount (2 Kings xvii., *passim*). It was not till Hezekiah, presumably under Isaiah's influence, removed the "high places" (2 Kings xviii. 4) that we find any serious attempt to put them down. They had been tolerated, apparently, because, as in Rabshakeh's taunt (2 Kings xviii. 22), they were nominally connected with the worship of Jehovah. Under the confluent polytheism of Manasseh they naturally reappeared (2 Kings xxi. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3). The reformation of Josiah was more thorough (2 Kings xxiii., *passim*; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3), and was probably stimulated by Hilkiah and Huldah. The discovery of the book of the Law (probably Deuteronomy), with its condemnations of mountain sanctuaries, though, as we have seen, the Bamoth were not prohibited by name, roused the zeal of the prophets, especially of the priest-prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and when the Bamoth-cultus revived, after the death of Josiah, the former was strong in his protests (Jer. vii. 31, *et al.*), all the more so because now, as in the earlier stages of their history, they had become high places of Baal (Jer. xix. 5; xxxii. 35), and were associated with abominations like those of the worship of Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom. So it was that Ezekiel, writing on the banks of the Chebar, is now led to place them in the forefront of the sins of his people.

Ver. 4.—**Your images, etc.** The "sun-images" of the Revised Version shows why these are mentioned as distinct from the "idols." The *chammanim* were pillars or obelisks identified with the worship of Baal as the sun-god, standing on his altars (2 Chron. xxxiv. 4), coupled with the "groves," or *Asherim* (Isa. xvii. 8; xxvii. 9), and with the "high places" in 2 Chron. xiv. 5. **I will cast down your slain men before your idols.** As in the prophecy against Bethel (1 Kings xiii. 2), and in Josiah's action (2 Kings xxiii. 16), this was the *ne plus ultra* of desecration. Where there had been the sweet savour of incense there should be the sickening odour of the carcases of the slain. The word for "idols" (*gillulim*), though found elsewhere, notably in Ezekiel's favourite text-books (Lev. xxvi. 30; Deut. xxix. 17), is more prominent in his writings (where it occurs thirty-six times) than in any other book of the Old Testament, and means, primarily, a cairn or heap of stones, which, like the "sun-images," came to be associated with Baal. Ezekiel repeats both words in ver. 6, with all the emphasis of scorn. He predicts the coming of a time when the work of destruction should be done more thoroughly than even Josiah had done it. When that time came, the familiar formula, "Ye shall know that I am the Lord," should receive yet another fulfilment.

Ver. 8.—**Yet will I leave a remnant, etc.** The thought, though not the word, is that of Isa. i. 9; x. 20; Zeph. ii. 7; iii. 13; Jer. xliii. 5. For these, at least, the punishment would, in greater or less measure, do its work; and, in remembering Jehovah, they would find the beginning of conversion.

Ver. 9.—**Because I am broken with their whorish heart.** The words have been very differently rendered. (1) The Revised Version mainly follows the Authorized Version, but gives, *they shall remember . . . how I have been broken*, etc. So taken, the words are boldly anthropomorphic, and ascribe to Jehovah the word which implies the strongest form of human distress. The "whorish heart" of the people has made Jehovah himself "broken-hearted." (2) Most recent critics, however, follow the rendering of the Vulgate (*contrivi*), and take the verb, which is passive in form, as being like a Greek verb in the middle voice transitive in form, with an implied reflex force. So we get, as in the margin of the Revised Version, "I have broken their whorish heart." So taken, thought and words are both connected with Ps. li. 17, and the self-loathing that follows has its counterpart in Job xlii. 6. The thought is eminently characteristic of Ezekiel (xx. 43; xxxvi. 31), and, we may add also, of Leviticus (xxvi. 39—42).

Ver. 10.—I have not said in vain, etc. The thought of that self-loathing and repentance reconciles Ezekiel to his work. To "labour in vain" is the great misery of all workers for God. A time will come when he shall see that God has not sent him to such a work "in vain." What before was dark will be made clear unto him (comp. ch. xiv. 23). Ezekiel's words, "not in vain," are echoed frequently by St. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 14, 58; 2 Cor. vi. 1; Phil. ii. 16, *et al.*). The corresponding phrase, "I have broken their eyes," sounds strange to us; but, after all, the heart is not literally broken more than the eyes, and figuratively the same words may be applied to either, so that there is no need for supposing, with some critics, that a more appropriate verb has been dropped out. Eyes and heart were alike involved in the sin (ch. xx. 7, 8, 24; Numb. xv. 39), and both came under the same chastisement that was to lead them to repentance.

Ver. 11.—Smite with thine hand, etc. The outward gestures were to give a dramatic emphasis to the mingled indignation and sorrow with which the prophet was to utter his woe. A like action meets us in ch. xxi. 12. Instances of its use for other feelings meet us in ch. xxii. 13; Numb. xxiv. 10 (anger); Jer. xxxi. 19 (shame).

Ver. 12.—He that is far off, etc. The three forms of judgment named in ver. 11 have each their special victims. Pestilence comes chiefly on those who are outside the city, exposed to the weather changes and the taint of unburied corpses (ver. 5); the sword of the Chaldeans on those who venture on a sally, or try to escape from the city; famine presses heaviest on those who are besieged within it. None can escape the judgment. The word besieged is the same as in Isa. i. 8; but it may have the sense, as in Isa. xlix. 6, of "kept," or "preserved," for the worst evil of the three.

Ver. 13.—The thought is the same as in ver. 6, but the localities are given in greater detail. The "hills" and "mountains" were naturally the scenes of the worship of the "high places," and these were commonly associated with groves of trees, as in Jer. ii. 20; iii. 6; Isa. lvii. 5. In Hos. iv. 13, oaks (or terebinths), poplars, and elms are specifically named (comp. Deut. xii. 2; 2 Kings xvi. 4). Where they did offer sweet savour, etc. The phrase is eminently characteristic of Ezekiel as a priest (ch. xvi. 19; xx. 28, 41), and is specially prominent in the books which he must have studied. It meets us three times in Exodus, seventeen in Leviticus, seventeen in Numbers, and seldom elsewhere. The crowning sin, from the prophet's point of view, was that the incense which was due to Jehovah had been lavished on the false gods of the nations.

Ver. 14.—More desolate than the wilderness towards Diblath; better, with the Authorized Version, *from the wilderness.* The name does not appear elsewhere, and has not been identified. Assuming the Authorized Version rendering, we must think of Ezekiel as naming, as Dante names the Valdichiana ('Inf.,' xxix. 47), some specially horrible and desolate region. For such a region the name of Diblah (a cake of figs) does not seem appropriate. Taking the Revised Version translation ("from the wilderness toward Diblah"), we have a phrase analogous to "from Dan to Beersheba," as denoting the extent of the desolation. The "wilderness" is usually applied to the nomad region south of Palestine, and this would lead us to look for Diblah in the north, and so to look elsewhere than to the two places Beth-diblathaim (Jer. xlviii. 22) and Almon-diblathaim (Numb. xxxiii. 46), both of which are in Moab. The difficulty was solved by Jerome by the conjectural emendation of Riblah, the two Hebrew letters for *d* and *r* being often written by copyists for each other. Riblah (it is a suggestive fact that the two chief manuscripts of the LXX., the Alexandrian and the Vatican, have *Deblatha*, or *Deblaa*, in 2 Kings xxiii. 33; xxv. 6) was a fortified town on the north road from Palestine to Babylon, where the Babylonian kings used to take up their position during their invasions of the former. Within a short time after Ezekiel wrote this chapter, it became memorable in its connection with Zedekiah's sufferings (comp. 2 Kings xxiii. 33; xxv. 6, 20, 21; Jer. xxxix. 5, 6; lii. 9, 10, 26). Its probable site is fixed on the banks of the Orontes. The evidence, on the whole, is, I think, in favour of this interpretation. It is adopted by Ewald, Cornill, Smend, Gesenius, and most recent critics. An additional fact in its favour is that Hamath, in the same region, appears as an ideal northern boundary in ch. xlvii. 16.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The doom of the mountains.* After leaving the low flat shores of Egypt, the traveller is struck by a great contrast of scenery as he approaches the Holy Land, and sees the purple mountains rising one behind another from the sandhills of *Jaffa* in the foreground to the distant uplands of Judah far away in the interior of the country. On landing he finds that travelling in Palestine is a rough experience in mountaineering, for the territory of Israel is a mountain country. Though Ezekiel could not see his native land from the plains of Mesopotamia, he could turn his face westward, and, looking across the great Syrian desert, fix his eyes in imagination on the old familiar beacons—the more memorable from their contrast with his present tame surroundings—and picture to himself his mountain home, with the passion of a highlander banished to the plains. In prophesying against Israel he then denounces a doom on the mountains.

I. The mountains are conspicuous. They were and are to this day the leading features of the Palestine landscape. God's judgment does not fall in obscure corners. He is not confined to secret places. The most public scenes witness his work. He paints his warning pictures on a broad canvas, and lifts them up for all to see.

II. The mountains are lost. Men in high places do not escape the power of God. No position is so exalted as to be above the reach of the Divine government. The waters of the Flood covered the mountains, and drowned the people who vainly expected safety by climbing (Gen. vii. 20). Kings are called to God's bar of judgment. Exalted rank, high intelligence, fame, power, influence, all come under the great sweep of God's rule, and may suffer punishment from his just anger.

III. The mountains are historic. They carry memories of many a glorious age. Moriah is sacred to the education of Abraham; the very stones that now lie scattered on the hills of Bethel once shaped themselves in Jacob's dream as a heaven-scaling stairway; Gilboa witnessed the death of Saul; the hills of Judah are fresh with associations of the shepherd-king. The changeless, venerable mountains enshrine the national story. The doom of the mountains is a doom of history. It declares failure and ruin after a glorious past—a splendid day ending with a stormy sunset. Happily there was a new sunrise when these same mountains were trodden by the feet of the Saviour, and upon them the feet of the messengers of peace were seen.

IV. The mountains are massive. They are the bulwarks of Israel. The old Amorites defended themselves in their mountain fastnesses against the Israelite invasion. When Israel was in possession she found these mountains to be natural fortresses. They were also hiding-places. Men in danger fled to the mountains for safety. But now the mountains themselves are doomed. The best earthly refuge fails. The curse of sin breaks the soul's stoutest shield.

V. The mountains are sacred. They were "high places" on which old altars had been built. There Abraham sacrificed, there Elijah invoked the attesting fire. But the sacred associations were defiled by later idolatrous rites, and the high places became evil places. Then no sacredness could protect them. There is no asylum at a defiled sanctuary. Religion joined to sin does not save the sinner; it only proclaims him a hypocrite, or at best one who sins against light.

VI. The mountains are fruitful. Cut into terraces, their slopes were formerly converted into vineyards, but now all round Jerusalem the ragged lines of stone tell the tale of neglected culture and long-destroyed productiveness. A blight has fallen on the doomed mountains. The very land has shared in the sufferings of its people. All things external as well as spiritual suffer from the curse of sin. No ancient fruitfulness will stay this curse. Under its ban, the garden of Eden becomes a waste howling wilderness, and the fertile mountain-side a desolation.

Ver. 6.—*A ruined civilization.* Palestine is now a land of ruins, and the prophecy before us predicted that condition. But there is more behind. Houses broken down, altars overthrown, streets grass-grown, inhabited places made desolate,—these are the outward and visible signs of a decayed and broken civilization. The destruction of the civilization is the real disaster. This happened in Israel when wild beasts came out from the forests and prowled over the once safe and populous country; and it happened in another form in Europe when the hardy barbarians poured over the plains of Italy, and destroyed, not only buildings, but also the whole fabric of ancient society, and so ushered in the gloom and disorder which took possession of the early part of the Middle Ages.

I. Civilization may be ruined. It is more tenacious of life than physical existence. Cities may be overthrown, and yet civilization may outlive the shock. Rome, burnt in the days of Nero, rose again in greater splendour; the fire of London swept away wretched tenements and prepared for a nobler city; the great conflagrations of Chicago was followed by the building of a new city in the smouldering ashes. But a widespread desolation affects the sources of intellectual life and the means of social intercourse. Roads are neglected, bridges are broken down, lonely districts are infested with robbers and rendered unsafe for travel; there is neither time nor energy for mental culture. Christian civilization has been lost on the north coast of Africa, where Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine were once shining lights; it has almost vanished from the site of the seven Churches of Asia. Modern Egypt is far below the Egypt of the Pharaohs in civilization: the fellaheen of to-day build mud hovels; their ancestors forty centuries ago constructed the great Hall of Columns at Karnak—one of the wonders of the world. The ancient civilization of Mexico had entirely vanished before the discovery of South America by the importers of a new Roman Catholic civilization.

II. The ruin of civilization is unspeakably dreadful. Frightful physical sufferings often accompany it, and gross moral outrages are then rife and go unchecked and unpunished. The refined and delicately nurtured people are put to the most exquisite torture of mind, if not of body. The hideous experiences of the Indian mutiny may give us some idea as to what this means. When such violent methods are not pursued, and a slow decay takes the place of a sudden destruction, the chronic and ever-deepening misery of the more cultivated people must be heart-rending. But apart from the question of suffering, the very act of throwing back the car of progress for some centuries involves a disastrous loss to the world. The Christian civilization that has grown out of the experience of ages and slowly ripened through generations of culture is the most precious heritage we have received from our forefathers. Let us guard and treasure it as a sacred trust.

III. Nevertheless such a ruin of civilization may become a moral necessity. While outwardly brilliant, society may be inwardly corrupt. This was the case with the old heathen nations and to a frightful extent. Civilized wickedness means elaborate and inventive wickedness, which bears fruits of evil ten times worse than any that grow on the wild tree of untutored barbarism. This was evidently the case in the histories of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. Beneath the glitter of a splendid civilization, and in spite of the high cultivation of art and philosophy, the human character was rotting to death. Something like this was approached by Israel. The very religion was corrupted. Then it was best that the altars should be overthrown, the cities destroyed, and the people scattered. There is no more horrible wickedness in the present day than that of those dwellers in centres of culture who have abandoned themselves to vice. When civilization has become effete, it is a hotbed of moral disease, and it is best for the health of society that it should be broken up and destroyed utterly. We cannot put new wine in old bottles.

Ver. 8.—*The remnant.* The remnant that is to escape in the greatest destruction appears repeatedly in Hebrew prophecy. Its existence is evidently regarded as of deep significance, over and above the value of the individual lives spared, as a ray of light in the otherwise universal gloom, a glimmer of hope amidst the deepening depair.

I. The remnant is a sign of God's mercy. He did not utterly destroy his guilty people. Not loving the work of judgment, he spared all whom it was safe to spare. God is never given over to wholesale and indiscriminate wrath. In his darkest hours of anger he makes a way of escape. Perhaps few as yet can avail themselves of it—only a "remnant." Still it is provided by God, since he loves to heal, and hates to destroy.

II. The remnant is bound to serve God. All who are saved out of great destruction by the merciful hand of God should consider themselves the redeemed of the Lord, who belong to the God who has delivered them. God does not spare that we may be negligent or indifferent. Every Christian is like a part of this remnant, delivered by God from the doom of a guilty world; therefore every Christian has reason to acknowledge that his life belongs to God, and to spend it in God's service.

III. THE REMNANT IS A SECURITY FOR HISTORICAL CONTINUITY. This remnant treasures up the tradition of the fathers. If *all* Israel had been cut off, there would have been an end to the development of Hebrew revelation, the Scriptures would have been lost, the line of descent in which the Christ was to appear would have been stopped, and God's great purposes for blessing the world through Israel would have been frustrated. But the thin thread of the "remnant" carries down the ancient tradition, and becomes the invaluable link of connection between the venerable glory of the past and the even greater glory of the future. It thus illustrates the continuity of history, revelation, and religion. This continuity is an essential condition of progress. Had there been no remnant, the Divine education would have needed to begin again *de novo*. In the dark ages a remnant of the better days before still lingered, and though it was but as a smouldering spark, it was sufficient to be fanned into a new flame by the fresh winds of the Renaissance and the Reformation. It is plainly according to God's purpose that future enterprises for the good of the world should be linked on to the attainments of the past. The danger of a democracy lies in being too blind and self-satisfied to see this Divine method of continuity.

IV. THE REMNANT IS A SEED OF A LARGER FUTURE. It is not to be always only a remnant. The old stump will sprout and grow into a tree again. The remnant of Israel became a nation once more in the days of Cyrus. Thus like the "elect," first as a nation and later as a Church, this "remnant" is not favoured exclusively for its own sake, as especially meritorious, or as arbitrarily chosen for a privileged position. Every Divine privilege is given that they who receive it may be the better able to convey the blessing of God to their fellow-men. The Church is chosen out of the world that she may labour for the good of the world, and, by bringing the gospel to all men, enlarge her own borders and ultimately share her privileges with all mankind.

Ver. 10.—*The consciousness of God.* To know that God is the Lord, *i.e.* Jehovah, is very different from knowing that Jehovah is God. In the latter case the true God is distinguished from false gods, as in Elijah's great appeal (1 Kings xviii. 21, 39). But in the former case, though there is no question of what God shall be worshipped, the being and presence of the one true God need to be believed and realized. Jehovah means, "He who is," the Eternal, the one true self-existent Being. When we know that God is Jehovah we are assured of his true, present, living existence.

I. WHAT THINGS HINDER US FROM KNOWING THAT GOD IS THE LORD? 1. *His invisibility.* "No man hath seen God at any time." We sweep the sky with the telescope, but it reveals no God sitting on the circle of the heavens. His voice is not heard in the crash of the winter storm, or the whispering of the summer leaves. We feel after him in the darkness and silence, but we cannot touch him. Can he be if no one ever sees, hears, or touches him? 2. *The disorder of the world.* (1) Men seem to be free to do as they will, lawless wickedness triumphing over innocence, vice victorious and virtue confounded. If there is a Judge of all the earth, why does he permit such crime against the highest law to go unchecked and unpunished? (2) Nature is now known to be a battle-ground of fierce contending selfishness in animal life, the vegetable world a wilderness in which the strongest plant, though the coarsest, kills the weakest though it be the most beautiful. Where is the God of nature? 3. *The earthly mindedness of men.* Here is the secret of the lost vision of God. "He is not far from any one of us." But "our eyes are holden." A constant traffic with things material darkens our sight of the supersensual. Sin completes the fatal work, and turns the dim vision into total spiritual blindness.

II. WHAT INFLUENCES WILL BRING US TO KNOW THAT GOD IS THE LORD? Ezekiel tells us that this knowledge was to be brought about by the judgment of God on Israel. 1. *The fulfilment of prophecy.* God had threatened punishment. The Jews had doubted the warning. When it was fulfilled, they would discover the genuineness of the message, and the real existence of him who sent it. The accomplished prophecies of the Bible show the working mind of God. The life of Christ confirms the presence of God in Messianic prophecy. Christian history verifies Christ's word about the leaven hidden in the meal. Moreover, the present fulfilment of ancient prophecy reveals the existence among us of the same God who inspired the prediction. 2. *The exercise of power.* The foolish Jews were self-confident and boastful. They thought that they were free to choose their own religion. The great invasions and the consequent break-up of the nation humbled them to the dust, and awoke in their hearts an alarmed consciousness of the higher power of God who had sent this doom upon them. We cannot see God, but we can see his work, and in this discern the energy which witnesses to his being. 3. *The vindication of righteousness.* Sin does not triumph eternally. Our induction is too narrow, our survey is too brief. A wider grasp and a larger patience would teach us that God is in history punishing guilty nations and advancing what is true and good and great, just as he is in nature raising the type of being through the very struggle for existence which, to the short-sighted gaze of the unthinking spectator, looks as purposeless as it is painful. The grand vindication of righteousness and the establishment of the kingdom of heaven in the advent of the Son of man are to us the greatest proofs that God is the Lord.

Ver. 14.—*The outstretched hand.* We usually picture to ourselves God's hand stretched out to help and heal. Here, however, we see a prediction of the same exertion of Divine energy for a contrary purpose—to smite and make desolate. The prediction suggests certain features of Divine chastisement.

I. IT IS OCCASIONAL. "I *will* stretch out my hand." This refers to one definite act, not to a perpetual treatment. "He will not *always* chide." "The mercy of the Lord *endureth for ever.*" But his anger and punishing are limited to occasion and necessity. The very fact that men refuse to believe in the wrath of God bears testimony to his long-suffering. In life-giving energy God works unceasingly, so that "in him we live, and move, and have our being." It is an eternal truth, not representing a sudden interposition, but the normal order of providence, that "underneath are the everlasting arms." Nevertheless, there *are* occasions when another mode of action is necessary, and the hand of God must smite in anger.

II. IT BELONGS TO THE FUTURE. God says he *will* stretch out his hand. It is not yet done. Future punishment will be far worse than any present sufferings of sin. It is impossible for us to measure that punishment by what we now experience, because sentence is not yet executed. But if the punishment is future, there is a possibility of its being averted, or of the sinner finding some means of escape. The warnings of Scripture are not written in order to fix our doom, but for the very opposite purpose, to drive us to the refuge of repentance and pardon.

III. IT IS FAR-REACHING. The hand stretched out signifies God's action at a distance. Though locally close to all, he is spiritually far off from those who have forgotten his presence, forsaken his way, and wandered into remote tracks of sin. Yet God can reach the most distant sinner. He met Jonah on the ocean. It is impossible to flee from God. Our utter neglect of God does not cause his utter neglect of us. The godless will be judged by God. This is a most merciful fact. To be abandoned by God would be worse than to be punished by him. Left alone to our self-chosen fate, we should perish in the outer darkness. The outstretched hand of God, which extends to the most remote, is their one ground of hope, even though at first it only reaches them to smite.

IV. IT IS WIDE IN ITS GRASP. It is not said that God's *finger* will touch a distant people, but that his *hand* will be outstretched. There is breadth and comprehensiveness in the image. It suggests a large sweep of Divine energy. There is to be a national judgment. The greatness of the number of guilty persons will be no safeguard in the day when God comes to judgment. There is, indeed, a sense of security in the consciousness of companionship. But if the many sin, the many must suffer. On the other hand, the wide grasp will reach those who seek to elude it by subtlety, singularity, and subterfuge. There is no possibility of escaping general punishment by a secret withdrawal from the scenes of ordinary evil to a peculiar region of our own wickedness.

V. IT IS POWERFUL. When God stretches out his hand he is evidently about to exert some mighty energy. He is awake and active in our midst. Then the fertile land may become a desert. This fearful manifestation of God will assuredly prove his present power. Woe to them who wait for such a proof before giving heed to God!

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—6.—*The idolatry of the land avenged.* Turning from the city of Jerusalem to the land generally, the Prophet Ezekiel addresses himself to Israel, the nation whom God had chosen, and who had rejected God. By a striking figure of speech, he delivers his message to the mountains and hills, the water-courses and ravines of Palestine. How dear all these features of the land of his fathers must have been to the prophet, we can easily imagine; national and religious associations must, in the course of centuries, have gathered round every portion of the territory which Jehovah had given to the descendants of Abraham. The apostrophe to the country was at the same time a word to the nation; the people and the land were identified. The artist, the poet, may deal with scenery apart from the living inhabitants who dwell amidst it. But the patriot, the prophet, the preacher, love the land for the people's sake who make it their home. To Ezekiel the land of Israel was—

I. A SCENE OF IDOLATRY. Before its possession by the Israelites, the land of Canaan was a stronghold of idolatry and of idolatrous rites and practices of the foulest and cruellest kind. The commission which the children of Israel received was a commission to extirpate the idolaters, and to purge the land of its heathen abominations. Yet the candid and faithful record of Old Testament Scripture informs us that from the first the chosen people were led away by the example and influence of the ancient dwellers in the land, and learned to practise the abominations they were appointed to repress. One great aim of the seers and prophets was to reproach the nation because of prevailing idolatry and superstition, and to summon them to return to their allegiance, ever due to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is evident that the worship of the deities adored by the surrounding nations was prevalent even among those who were called to a purer faith; and that some of the kings, both of Judah and of Israel, sanctioned and encouraged idolatrous observances and idolatrous priesthoods. Thus the high places and the ravines of Palestine were defiled by the rites of folly, cruelty, and lust. These heathen deities were embodiments in imagination of the lusts which corrupt the human heart.

II. A SCENE OF PROPHETIC PROTEST AND REBUKE. It was a token of Divine mercy and forbearance that the apostate Israelites were not left to the delusions and errors, the defection and rebellion, into which they had suffered themselves to be led. The voice of the Lord's prophets was heard upon the mountains, and throughout the valleys, which had been abandoned to those who practised the fanatical, bloodthirsty, and polluted observances distinctive of Canaanitish and Phœnician idolatry. Impressions were produced upon individuals which resulted in a return to the service of Jehovah. There were temporary reformations, distinguished by penitence and by vows. But the reader of the prophetic Scriptures cannot but admit that there was no great national movement in the right direction. Notwithstanding faithful rebuke, severe denunciation, compassionate promise, the people returned again and again to their former follies. It was as though Israel had resolved that no exhortation and no threat should avail to keep the nation faithful to him who had exalted, defended, and prospered it, and who had borne with the manners of the rebellious people, not only in the wilderness, but in the land of promise. It was as though nothing short of captivity and exile, conjoined with the destruction and desolation of the capital, could teach the lesson which it was Israel's vocation first to acquire, and then to communicate to the world around.

III. A SCENE OF DESOLATION AND OF DEATH. The Prophet Ezekiel speaks here with conviction and certainty. There rises before his mind a vision which can only fill his heart with grief and mourning. It is a satisfaction, indeed, to his righteous soul to foresee the high places destroyed, the altars desolate, the images broken, and the works of idolaters abolished. But this is not all. He sees the dead carcases of the children of Israel, the scattered bones, the slain in the midst of the city, etc. And the vision of the depopulated land, the deserted and silent city, the vanquished and decimated nation, profoundly affects his patriotic and sensitive nature. It is a stern lesson, this which he has to teach; it is a terrible punishment, this which he has to anticipate and to foretell. Yet the lesson and the punishment are the Lord's. It is the word of the Lord which the prophet has to declare, the Lord of Israel who is at the same time the King of righteousness and of judgment. God brings the sword upon *his own* people; covers *his own* land with ruin and desolation. For his authority must not be defied, his laws must not be broken; his name must not be dishonoured with impunity. "The way of transgressors is hard." "The wages of sin is death." Until this lesson is learned, there is no place for the publication of clemency, for the proffer of mercy. The Law comes before the gospel; and they who do not honour the Law will not appreciate the gospel. It is in the midst of wrath that God remembers mercy.

APPLICATION. 1. There is such a thing as national guilt and apostasy. In our own time, individualism is carried to such an extreme that this fact is apt to be overlooked. A nation sins by its collective acts, and a nation suffers the just punishment of its evil-doing. History is ever teaching this lesson, which men—good and bad—in their absorption in personal interests, are prone to overlook. 2. The Church has responsibility for witnessing against national errors, for warning the people of the inevitable consequences of apostasy from God, and for uttering clearly and boldly the mind and will of him who is eternal righteousness and eternal love.—T.

Ver. 7.—*Conviction.* It seems at first hearing most extraordinary and unaccountable to be told that the end and issue of such a series of national disasters and judgments as those described in the verses preceding this is that Israel may *know.* Can the end be regarded as corresponding to the means? Is not such a result one to be secured by lessons less severe and calamitous? But in order to answer such questions we must consider the *object* of knowledge, which is not by any means of an ordinary kind. The "judgments" were the work of God's providence; and the purpose was to produce a conviction in the mind of the nation, Israel, that God lives and reigns, administers a moral government, and will not endure the disobedience and rebellion of those who are of right his subjects. This lesson must be taught, however distressing the discipline which leads to its acquisition. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord."

I. SUCH KNOWLEDGE IS OF THE HIGHEST SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE. Knowledge of every kind is to an intellectual being desirable, precious, and valuable. Knowledge of great, venerable, noble, or interesting persons, is of all knowledge the most precious; for personality exceeds in interest all that is material. But there is no knowledge which can compare in dignity and value with the knowledge of him "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." The phenomena and laws of nature are of interest to the inquiring intelligence; but their chief interest, to the thoughtful mind, lies in their being a revelation of him who is the Source, the Creator, the Upholder, of all. If God is to be found in nature, how much more manifestly, and less incompletely, in man—the noblest work of the Eternal and Supreme! To know God is to satisfy the intellect, and is to find a centre for the emotions, and a law for the will. No knowledge can compensate the absence of this; all knowledge is completed by it.

II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS LOST SIGHT OF IN TIMES OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY AND SELF-INDULGENCE. So it was with the inhabitants of Judah and Israel; so has it been in the experience of many nations. This may easily be explained. Man is a compound being, body and soul; he is connected both with the scenes, occupations, and experiences of earth, and with the great realities of eternity. There is much in the world to absorb and engross human attention, interest, and concern. And it is quite in harmony with all we know of human nature, that those whose minds are engaged in the pursuits of time and sense should be forgetful of the higher truths and laws of the eternal prospects, in which they may not deliberately disbelieve. How often has it happened that, when God has satisfied a nation's temporal cravings, he has sent leanness into their souls! Their very blessings, as they deem them, become the occasion of their forgetfulness of the Giver. It is with nations as with individuals—the satisfaction of earthly needs may silence the aspiration for heavenly good.

III. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MAY BE ACQUIRED IN THE TIME OF RETRIBUTION AND SUFFERING. If there is purpose in Divine providence, what so reasonable as to believe that the corrections administered to individuals and to nations are designed to awaken juster and higher thoughts—thoughts of God's wisdom and righteousness? How many have found that it was good for them to be afflicted; since before they were afflicted they went astray, whilst in affliction they have learned to observe God's Word! It may be objected that the highest and fullest knowledge of God is not thus to be acquired. And this is true; yet this knowledge may be indispensable as a stage to a knowledge yet more precious. It may be that the first lesson to be acquired is a lesson of submission to God's will, of reverence for God's righteousness. Only after the acquisition of this lesson, it may be, does that of the Divine mercy and compassion come within reach. When men have forgotten that the universe is ruled by a just, wise, almighty King, from whose authority none can escape, they must be brought to acknowledge this fact, that they may lay down the arms of rebellion, and may seek forgiveness and find reconciliation.

IV. SUCH KNOWLEDGE SHOULD, AND OFTEN DOES, LEAD TO SINCERE AND ACCEPTABLE PIETY. Custom, tradition, superstition, are a poor and unstable foundation for true religion. Men must know God, must know his character, his mind, his will, in order that they may devoutly love him and acceptably serve him. Whilst there is undoubtedly a kind of knowledge, merely speculative, which is compatible with hatred of God and of his Law, there is, on the other hand, a knowledge which leads men to appreciate and adore the Divine attributes, and to seek participation in the Divine nature and in Divine favour.—T.

Ver. 8.—"*A remnant.*" When the corn is threshed by the flail, or by the teeth of the threshing-implement, as in the literal "tribulation," its bulk is reduced; for the grain is separated from the straw and the husk. It is so with a nation visited by the calamities which came upon the Hebrew people. Pestilence, famine, and sword are the means by which multitudes may perish; yet some may be left, and these are "a remnant."

I. THE CALAMITIES AND JUDGMENTS WHICH LEFT THE FEW AS A REMNANT. These were they who escaped. When the horrors that came upon the land are considered, the wonder is that there were survivors. As he who is saved from a fire looks back upon the sudden and furious conflagration, surveys the smoking ruins from which he has been rescued; as he who is the sole survivor from a shipwreck remembers with shuddering the violence of the tempest by which his comrades were engulfed in the ocean;—so may those who have been spared in time of national calamity profit as they recall the circumstances of peril and terror by which they, with others, were encompassed, from which they, as distinguished from others, have been delivered. Who is there who, looking back upon the past scenes of even an uneventful life, cannot call to mind many of his early companions who have been the victims of disease, of misfortune, of accident, of temptation, whose earthly probation has been brought to a sudden close, whilst he himself, and a few others with him, are, as it were, "a remnant," and that through no personal merit?

II. THE MERCY THAT SPARES THEM AS A REMNANT. The same inscrutable wisdom which suffers some to be overtaken and overwhelmed, provides that others shall be spared and saved. As Noah and his family were spared, whilst a vast population was engulfed in the Flood; as Lot and his household were spared, whilst the inhabitants of the guilty city were consumed by fire from heaven;—so again and again has the forbearance of God been revealed in providing for the escape of "a remnant," who have remained to witness to Divine justice, and to use aright the opportunity afforded by Divine mercy towards themselves.

III. THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH A REMNANT IS PERMITTED TO SURVIVE. This is only very partially explained in the context. The mind of the prophet was so absorbed with the consideration of the guilt of his idolatrous and rebellious fellow-countrymen, and with their impending fate, that for the time he was not able to reflect upon the ultimate ends for which some were spared amidst the awful catastrophe. Yet this was present to his mind as one immediate result of the mingled judgments and mercies of God; those spared from the calamities of the nation should know and acknowledge that Jehovah was the Lord. As a matter of fact, the lesson was learnt; and the remnant who returned to Palestine returned free henceforth from all inclination to idolatry. And if they did not cease to sin, at all events they were henceforth free from sin of this form. They lived to remember for themselves, and to witness to their children, that the nations are ruled by a God of righteousness, and that in subjection to his authority and in obedience to his Law man's true welfare must ever lie. Their song was of mercy and of judgment. If they were few in numbers they were purified and strengthened, and fitted to fulfil the peculiar vocation of the sons of Abraham among the nations of the earth.

Application. Who is there who has not experienced the sparing mercy and long-suffering kindness of the Lord? Who has not been delivered from danger, from calamity, from destruction? Let all who acknowledge themselves to be, as it were, "a remnant," indebted to God's compassion, acknowledge the peculiar obligation under which they have been laid, to witness to the mercy of their heavenly Father, and by their practical loyalty to him to prove that they have not been spared in vain.—T.

Ver. 9.—*Self-loathing.* This very strong and very remarkable assertion concerning the remnant of Israel that should be spared amid the destruction and desolation about to overtake the nation and its metropolis, is a proof to every thoughtful reader that the mind of the prophet was occupied not so much with the external and political aspects of history as with the moral. In his view supreme importance is attached to the result of experience upon *character.* So regarded, calamity may be "blessing in disguise." If the chastisement of God awakens repentance and self-loathing, one purpose at all events, and that a most important purpose, has been answered.

I. Self-loathing is in contrast with former self-satisfaction and self-complacency. It is not natural to men to loathe themselves, however they may be tempted to loathe their fellow-men, where there has been infliction of injury or want of sympathy and congeniality. It is too common for men to look at their own character and their own conduct in the most favourable and flattering light; and to speak, or at all events to think, of themselves with approval and admiration. In most cases a great change must come over a man's mind in order that he may regard his character and his life with dissatisfaction, in order that he may hate himself.

II. Self-loathing is an indication of self-knowledge. Those who admire and approve themselves are, in many instances, if not in all, the victims of illusion. It is a rude, and yet it may be a wholesome, awakening, which sets a man face to face with his true self. His fancied excellences and virtues are seen to be faults. The blemishes which he has been accustomed to extenuate appear in their real deformity. He wonders how he could have misinterpreted his actions and misunderstood his character. He learns to know himself, not as he has imagined himself to be, but as he really is.

III. Self-loathing has abundant justification in the errors and follies of the past. When a man sees himself, in some measure, as God sees him to be, then trivial faults—as they were once deemed—become, in his apprehension serious and culpable. Sin is the abominable thing which God hates; and it is an evidence of true enlightenment when a man loathes his own offences against the laws of God and the dictates of his own conscience. The unspiritual detest deformities of body, defects of manner or of speech; the spiritually minded are more distressed at what is morally evil than at anything of a more external character.

IV. Self-loathing may lead to true repentance, and so to forgiveness and acceptance. To remain in a state of mind in which repugnance to evil absorbs the whole nature is to be abandoned to despondency. Sin is to be loathed in order that it may be forsaken; and that it may be forsaken it must be forgiven. The Scriptures abound in denunciations of sin, but they abound also in invitations to repentance and in promises of forgiveness. "Let the wicked forsake his way," etc. Reconciliation and purity are by the gospel assured to every penitent and believing sinner.

V. Thus self-loathing may be a means towards the removal of what occasioned it, and of the substitution of what can be regarded with thankfulness and delight. It may be said thus to work its own cure. Or, more properly, it may induce the repenting sinner to apply to the great Physician, by whose remedial treatment the unsoundness may be removed, and spiritual health, vigour, and happiness may be restored.—T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The land involved in man's punishment.* We have here a dramatic appeal to the stony hills of Palestine. Canaan is emphatically a mountainous country; and Ezekiel, speaking as the mouth-piece of God, addresses himself to the high places of Canaan, as the scenes of flagrant idolatry. From his residence by the banks of Chebar he could not see with his bodily eye these renowned, but now desecrated, hills; yet he sees them with the clear eye of imagination. His fervid appeal to these loved hills would naturally produce a new and wholesome impression on the minds of his hearers. The very mountains and rivers of the sacred land were stained with the people's sin and cursed with their curse. This dramatic address—

I. INDICATES MAN'S VAST RESPONSIBILITIES. Constituted as man is, the sovereign lord of this material globe, the fortunes of the land are indissolubly linked with the fortunes of its ruler. If man prospers, the fields smile with beauty and plentifulness; in man's curse, the hills and valleys participate. Guilty man cannot circumscribe the limits within which his misdeeds shall fall. Obedience makes our earth a paradise; transgression blasts it with barrenness and desolation.

II. THIS APPEAL IS A HUMILIATION TO THE PEOPLE. It implies that appeal to the stony ears of men is useless; appeal to the unconscious hills is more likely to succeed. When trees shall intelligently listen, and granite rocks shed tears of penitence, then may the expectation arise that the stolid hearts of the Hebrews will respond. When God speaks to the material elements, they do respond in their own proper way; but the corrupt nature of men resists all Divine appeals. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know" (Isa. i. 3). If God shed his sunshine on grass and flowers, fragrant incense spontaneously flows forth; yet, though Divinest love shines on every part of man, no effect is seen.

III. THIS APPEAL IS A MEASURE OF GOD'S DISPLEASURE. Wherever, in God's universe, there is a mark of sin, *there* shall be a mark of Divine displeasure. If the stones which God's hand has fashioned be employed in the service of idolatry, they shall be desecrated; they shall be stained with human blood; they shall bear a lasting mark of dishonour. The hill-tops and forest groves, which have been forced by man into this unholy alliance with idols, shall be marked by the symbols of death—shall be devoted to oblivion and to lizards. Becoming a scene of dead men's bones, they shall be associated, in the minds of the living, with slaughter, defeat, and ruin. Nothing shall last that does not bear the seal of God's favour. "The idols shall cease." And *ceased* they have! Where now is Moloch, and Dagon, and Baal, and Jupiter?

IV. THIS APPEAL DEMONSTRATES THE VANITY OF IDOLS. It was clear as the sun in the heavens that Israel's chosen idols had not protected them from famine and invasion. So long as the idols were preferred to Jehovah, there was safety nowhere. The temples and the altars of the gods had always been regarded as a sanctuary, fleeing to which human life was secure. But this custom was to cease. So fierce and destructive were God's avengers, that they would not respect the vicinity of altars, nor groves devoted to idol-gods. Even in the act of idolatrous sacrifice these delinquents should be slain, and it should be manifest that not the slightest modicum of power appertained to dumb idols.

V. THIS APPEAL EXHIBITS THE INGENUITY OF GOD'S LOVE. This dramatic appeal to the hills of Canaan was a gracious design of love, to find some entrance into the hearts of the people. As the skilful leader of a besieged city will go round it on every side, if haply he may find some gate or point by which access may be gained, so does God try every method which his eternal love can invent to gain admission to the hostile heart of the sinner. By speaking to the stolid mountains, does he not impress us with the callousness of our guilty nature? The devices of his compassion are inexhaustible. He will not give us over to destruction so long as a single ray of hope remains. Every threat of coming woe is a tear of Divine pity. God would not forewarn with such variety of argument if he did not deeply love. This is God's method —God-like.—D.

Vers. 8—10.—*Many lost; few saved.* The prospects of God's kingdom on the earth have never been wholly dark. A glint of light has always pierced the heavy clouds of gloom. Among the diseased grapes of the cluster, a solitary sound one is found. A thousand acorns are on the oak in autumn-time; three or four only take root and flourish. The elect are still the few. But it shall not always be so. The turning-point in their fortune is repentance. The internal change must always precede the external.

I. THE OCCASION OF THIS REPENTANCE. The occasion was affliction. Until disaster, defeat, and exile came, no change of mind appeared. The ploughshare of calamity broke up the hard and stolid soil, so that the sweet energies of grace might find an entrance. Judgment alone will not soften and subdue the proud will of man; but judgment and mercy combined have an almighty efficacy. No teacher is so effective as experience. The scattered few, who had escaped the all-devouring sword, pondered, reflected, mourned.

II. THE REALITY OF THEIR REPENTANCE. There is a spurious repentance which is only remorse—*i.e.* regret that the sin has been detected. But real repentance has respect to God. The sorrow does not so much respect self. It is grief that God is pained—that *his* heart is broken by our perversity and folly. The old selfishness has disappeared, and God has obtained his proper place in the soul. If so, repentance is real.

III. THE PROOF OF REPENTANCE. The proof indicated is self-loathing, self-condemnation. The things formerly loved are now hated. More than this, the penitent passes sentence on himself. He censures himself more severely than others censure him. His past deeds are as obnoxious to him as a dunghill, and that dunghill is *within* him. His own former self is detestable. He hates himself. No penalty seems for him too heavy. His chief fear is lest such sin as his should be beyond the possibility of mercy.

IV. THE EFFECT OF REPENTANCE. The result is intimate acquaintance with God—inward conviction of his truth and faithfulness. This knowledge of God is knowledge gained by experience. Such knowledge brings with it trust, admiration, love, peace; yea, life itself. "They that know thy Name will put their trust in thee." Formerly they were the dupes of falsehood; they wandered in darkness self-created. *Now* they are smitten by the charms of truth, and loyally follow the Truth.—D.

Vers. 11—14.—*Ministerial earnestness.* Earnestness is simply a fitting sense of duty. Earnestness is the outcome of reality. If a man has real conviction of his duty, and real compassion for others, he must be in earnest. Genuine earnestness is not equivalent to noise, display, hysterical excitement. It is wise and appropriate expression of feeling, and suitable to the occasion.

I. EARNESTNESS IS MANIFEST IN GESTURE AND ACT, AS WELL AS IN SPEECH. The man who has a due sense of his momentous office will adopt every device that will gain a hearing or leave due impression upon his hearers. Earnestness is contagious. If the speaker is in earnest, the hearer will feel the glow. There is eloquence in a look, in a tone, in a movement of the hand, in a gesture of the body. Tears are impressive appeals. God commands this whole-souled earnestness. To get an entrance for God's message into human hearts, every door must be tried, every avenue explored. To the extent that we can reach and move the obdurate souls of men, we are responsible for the result.

II. EARNESTNESS IS SEEN IN UNTIRING REPETITIONS OF GOD'S MESSAGE. It may be an irksome task to the prophet to repeat often the same facts and counsels; but he is not to think of himself, nor of his own tastes. He is a servant, not a master. To repeat the same things is proof of their real and vital importance. We cannot substitute other messages, because other messages have not the same importance. The constant dropping of water wears out even granite rocks; and, to conquer the callous natures of men there is required "line upon line; precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little."

III. EARNESTNESS IS SEEN IN ADDRESSING EVERY SIDE OF MAN'S NATURE. Some men are moved by fear, some by shame, some by the prospect of public dishonour. Many principles of human character are common to all men, yet do not dwell in men in equal proportions. In some, the moral sense is paramount. In some, feeling is predominant. In some, judgment and the logical faculty are supreme. The earnest prophet will appeal to each principle in turn. The approaching overthrow of the idols would impress some minds. The slaughter of their brethren and children beside the idolatrous altars would affect others. Exile and plague and premature death would touch the hearts of many. And the prospect of desolation in their own loved land ought to have moved the souls of all true Israelites. The exact pattern. Every face of the rebellious citadel must be assailed.

IV. EARNESTNESS IS SEEN IN UNSELFISH CONCERN FOR THE HONOUR OF GOD. Over and over again is the statement repeated, as if on this the prophet delighted to dwell, "They shall know that I am the Lord." Not for a moment did the man of God forget that he was standing in the stead of God, and spake as the "Spirit gave him utterance." He was identified with God's cause indissolubly. God and he were one. And although the interval of disorder and disloyalty might be long, the final outcome was glorious to contemplate—an object pleasing to every devout eye—*God shall be known and honoured!* The certainty of ultimate success fosters present courage, and inspires true earnestness.—D.

Vers. 1—7.—*The impotence of idols.* "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the mountains of Israel," etc. The former prophecies related chiefly to the city of Jerusalem and the land of Judah. But this one relates to the whole of the land of Israel. Hence the Lord God, through his prophet, addresses "the mountains and the hills," etc. (ver. 3). The burden of this chapter is a proclamation of Divine judgment because of the idolatry of the people. This, also, is a reason why certain geographical features of the country are mentioned. Mountains and hills, ravines and valleys, were chosen as localities for the worship of idols (cf. Deut. xii. 2; 2 Kings xvii. 10, 11; xxiii. 10). The Israelites should have sternly opposed and utterly abolished the idolatry of the land. They were explicitly and solemnly commanded to do so (Deut. xii. 1—3, 29—32; xiii.). But instead of doing this, they had themselves become idolaters; and they persisted in idolatry. Therefore God himself will take the work into his own hands, and will make an utter end of their idols and images, their altars and sacrifices. "Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places," etc. (cf. Lev. xxvi. 30—33). And by the execution of his dreadful judgment the impotence and vanity of the idols would be conspicuously exhibited. The text shows—

I. THE INABILITY OF IDOLS TO PROTECT THEIR WORSHIPPERS. "I will cast down your slain before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their idols. . . . And the slain shall fall in the midst of you." The dead bodies of the idolaters, slain for their idolatry, and cast down before the idols, constituted a striking testimony to the impotence of the idols to succour or defend their worshippers. But there are idols and idolaters in our age and in Christian lands. A man may be an idolater who never bows down to any image, or statue, or anything else. A man's god is that which he loves supremely; and in this sense he may make an idol of his wife, or his child, or of riches, power, popularity, success in business, or even of himself. "And an idol in the heart is as bad as one set up in the house." And these things, viewed as gods, are as impotent as the idols of the Israelites. They cannot ennoble human nature; they rather crush its highest aspirations, degrade its best affections, and dwarf its noblest faculties. They are altogether incapable of satisfying the cravings of the soul. Its hunger is too great, its thirst too intense, to be satisfied with any of the gods of modern civilization, or with all of them, or with anything less than God himself. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." Only in him can the religious heart of man find true rest. And these modern idols cannot protect their votaries. There are circumstances and conditions in life in which neither riches nor rank, popularity nor power, relatives nor friends, can render man any aid. There are trials which none of them can ward off; dangers which none of them can shield us from; and none of them can save us from death, or give us hope beyond it.

II. THE INABILITY OF IDOLS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR ALTARS. 1. *They cannot protect themselves and their altars from desecration.* "I will cast down your slain before your idols. And I will lay the dead carcases of the children of Israel before their idols; and I will scatter your bones round about your altars." Thus were the idolatrous images and altars polluted by dead bodies and decaying bones (cf. 1 Kings xiii. 2; 2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16). 2. *They cannot protect themselves and their altars from destruction.* "I will destroy your high places. And your altars shall be desolate, and your images shall be broken. . . . And the high places shall be desolate, that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your images may be cut down, and your works may be abolished." And these idols, which the Israelites worshipped, were utterly powerless to avert their own destruction. How often does God in mercy destroy our idols! The riches which we are almost worshipping he makes to slip from our tightening grasp. Our worldly successes, which were drawing our hearts away from him, he turns into disastrous failures. The man who has made fame his god, and endeavoured to satisfy his soul with the fickle breath of popular applause, has found his idol broken into fragments; he is no longer greeted with plaudits, but with execrations. And when our love to any one has been growing into idolatry, God has taken from us the desire of our eyes with a stroke. And in all these cases the Divine intent has been that we should discover the vanity of our idols, and turn unreservedly to the one living and true God. And in all, the idols are powerless to save themselves, and we are powerless to save them.

III. The inability of idols leading idolaters to know and acknowledge the true God. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord." When these judgments had been executed, and the vanity of their idols thus demonstrated, the Israelites would know by experience that Jehovah is the true God. 1. *That he is the true God as distinguished from the false gods—the idols.* 2. *That he is the almighty God as contrasted with the impotent idols.* 3. *That he is the living and eternal God as contrasted with the dead idols which had been demolished.* Israel would not learn this lesson in seasons of peace and prosperity, though it had been taught them in many forms, and with the reiteration of infinite patience. But they would learn it, and, as a matter of fact, they did learn it, when it was impressed upon them by the stern judgments of siege and famine, sword and captivity. And still there are those who need trial and suffering to teach them the same lesson. They will not in heart and life acknowledge the true God until they have been taught, by bitter and painful experience, the vanity of the idols which they had set up in their hearts. Blessed are they, if even thus they learn that only the Supreme Being is worthy of the soul's supreme love and reverence.

Conclusion. "Little children, guard yourselves from idols." "Wooden idols are easily avoided, but take heed of the idols of gold. It is no difficult matter to keep from dead idols" in the form of statues or images, but guard yourselves against the manifold forms of modern and civilized idolatry. Yield not even the least to anything or any person who would contend for the throne of your heart. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."—W. J.

Vers. 8—10.—*Stages in the soul's progress from sin unto salvation.* "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations," etc. These verses exhibit the exercise of mercy even in the execution of judgment; and they indicate certain stages in the restoration of a remnant of the people to the Lord Jehovah.

I. Sin leading to punishment. In dealing with previous paragraphs we have already spoken of the sin and of the punishment of the Israelites. Their chief sin was idolatry. It is spoken of in our text as whoredom. The chosen people are looked upon as the wife of Jehovah (cf. Jer. ii. 2; Hos. ii. 19, 20). And in turning from him to worship idols, they played the part of a wife that is unfaithful to her husband (cf. Jer. iii. 9, 20). And when they persisted in this infidelity, despite exhortation, remonstrance, and warning, the righteous judgment of God came upon them—siege, famine, pestilence, sword, captivity. Sin ever leads to suffering. Sooner or later penalty follows transgression. "Be sure your sin will find you out;" "Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him."

II. Punishment leading to recollection. "They that escape of you shall remember me among the nations whither they shall be carried captives." The goodness of God is designed to lead men to repentance (cf. Rom. ii. 4); but sometimes it fails to do so by reason of the perversity of the heart of man. Some men partake of the gifts of the Divine goodness without any thought of the bountiful Bestower. But affliction not unfrequently accomplishes that which prosperity failed to effect. It was in the far country, in poverty, degradation, and destitution, that the prodigal son came to himself, and remembered his father's house (Luke xv. 14—17). And though Israel had forsaken the Lord, he had not forsaken them. Even his judgments were an evidence of this (cf. Hos. ii. 6, 7). In wrath he remembers mercy. In his terrible visitation for their sins he spares a remnant of them. And in the miseries of captivity that remnant remembers him. As a faithless wife who has deserted a good husband will almost certainly have occasion to remember in bitterness of soul him whom she has so basely and cruelly wronged, so the remnant of the Israelites, in the sorrows of their exile, would remember the Lord Jehovah, whom they had rejected for vain idols. Suffering should induce recollection and reflection. Trials should lead us to review our life and consider our ways.

III. RECOLLECTION LEADING TO REPENTANCE. "When I have broken their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and their eyes, which go a-whoring after their idols; and they shall loathe themselves for the evils which they have committed in all their abominations." Where this rendering differs from that of the Authorized Version it is supported by Hengstenberg, Schröder, and the 'Speaker's Commentary.' Amongst the remnant of the Israelites, recollection prepared the way for repentance, of which three aspects are here indicated. 1. *Repentance in its origin.* "When I have broken their whorish heart." Whatever may be the means by which it is brought about, penitence is the product of Divine grace (cf. Acts v. 31; xi. 18). In this Christian age, God brings gracious gospel influences to bear upon the hearts of men by the operation of his Holy Spirit, in order to quicken them into penitence for sin. 2. *Repentance in its seat.* "When I have broken their heart." Repentance is not merely a change of mind, but a change of feeling. It is godly sorrow on account of sin (cf. 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." 3. *Repentance in its expression.* "They shall loathe themselves for the evils they have committed in all their abominations." The true penitent never seeks to excuse himself on account of his sins, or to explain them away, or to extenuate the guilt of them. He takes shame to himself on account of them; and humbly confesses them to God. He says, "I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me," etc. (Ps. li. 3—5); "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God," etc. (Ezra ix. 6); "God be merciful to me a sinner." It is well when recollection thus leads to repentance unto life. It did so in the case of the psalmist: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies," etc. (Ps. cxix. 59, 60). And David prophesied that it should be so throughout the world: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord," etc. (Ps. xxii. 27).

IV. REPENTANCE LEADING TO DEVOUT RECOGNITION OF GOD. "And they shall know that I am the Lord, and that I have not said in vain that I would do this evil unto them." "The Lord would have spoken in vain, or to no purpose, if the event had not corresponded with the utterance. By the correspondence of utterance and event, they know that he who has spoken by the son of man is Jehovah—is God in the fullest sense" (Hengstenberg). They shall know him as the living and true God in contrast to the dead and vain idols (see on ver. 7). And more than this, true repentance leads to forgiveness and reconciliation with God; and thus the penitent soul comes to know him by devout sympathy and hallowed communion with him.

CONCLUSION. Learn that pain and trial are blessed when by Divine grace they lead to earnest reflection, and sincere repentance, and saving knowledge of God (cf. Ps. cxix. 67, 71; Heb. xii. 10, 11).—W. J.

Ver. 11.—*The sorrow of the servant of God on account of the sins of his people.* "Thus saith the Lord God; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot," etc. Almost everything contained in the paragraph of which this verse forms a part (vers. 11—14) has already come under our notice in preceding portions of this book. But our text presents matter for profitable meditation. It teaches—

I. THAT THE TRUE SERVANT OF GOD REGARDS THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF SINNERS WITH DEEP SORROW. "Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel!" Idolatry was the great sin on account of which the prophet grieved. But our text suggests that idolatry is a multitudinous sin. It comprises many "abominations." In the worship of Peor the worshippers committed fornication; and in the worship of Moloch they committed homicide. In proportion as we participate in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we shall regard sin neither with levity, "Fools make a mock at sin;" nor with indifference; nor with extenuation of its guilt; but with deep grief. To the holy, sin must ever cause regret and pain of heart. Ezra mourned over it bitterly (Ezra ix. 3—6); so did the psalmist (Ps. cxix. 136, 158), the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. ix. 1; xiii. 17), the Apostle Paul (Rom. ix. 1—3), and our blessed Lord and Saviour (Mark iii. 5; Luke xiii. 34; xix. 41, 42). And in our text, grief for the sins of the people is expressed first, and for the miseries caused by their sins afterwards. There are many who mourn the losses and sufferings which result from sin, but comparatively few who mourn because of the sins themselves; yet these should awaken our sharpest sorrow.

II. THE TRUE SERVANT OF GOD REGARDS THE JUDGMENTS WHICH COME UPON SINNERS WITH DEEP SORROW. "Alas! . . . for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence." "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether;" and therefore his people should at least heartily acquiesce in them. But while consenting unto them, and cordially approving their righteousness, the godly will look with sorrow upon the woes which the wicked bring upon themselves by their sins. Nor is there anything wrong or unbecoming in this; for so our Lord viewed the miseries which he saw gathering over the guilty Jerusalem (Luke xix. 41—44), and so the pious and patriotic Jeremiah contemplated the captivity of the Lord's flock (Jer. xiii. 17). One cannot look upon calamity and suffering without sorrow, even when we know that these are the righteous retributions of sin. And if we could do so, there would not be anything either commendable or desirable in so doing.

III. THE TRUE SERVANT OF GOD ENDEAVOURS TO IMPRESS OTHERS WITH THE WICKEDNESS OF SIN AND THE DREAD PENALTIES THEREOF. "Thus saith the Lord God; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot." These gestures indicate strong emotion, which may be of various kinds. Thus Balak "smote his hands together" in anger (Numb. xxiv. 10); the Ammonites are represented as clapping their hands and stamping their feet in derision of the land of Israel (ch. xxv. 6); and in the text these gestures are intended to express keen sorrow, as we see from the words with which they were accompanied: "Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel!" Thus the prophet would denote his firm conviction of the certainty of the judgments which he announced, his earnest desire to impress the people with the reality and solemnity of these judgments, and his grief by reason of them. His entire being was, as it were, engaged in this expression of woe. "Words are transient," says Greenhill, "and leave little impression, but visible signs work more strongly, affect more deeply, and draw the spirits of beholders into a sympathy." And the servants of God in our own times cannot feel too deeply the wickedness of sin, or express their abhorrence thereof too strongly, if that abhorrence be genuine, or manifest too great a concern that sinners should flee from the wrath to come. If we realized the essential heinousness of sin, the unspeakable value of the soul, and the awful significance of its loss, we should deem no action unworthy, and no effort too great, if they were likely to lead sinners to turn from sin to the Saviour. "I know not," says Richard Baxter, "what others think of these concerns, but for my own part I am ashamed of my insensibility, and wonder at myself that I deal no more with my own and other men's souls, as becomes one who looks for the great day of the Lord. I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smites me that I have not been more serious and fervent. It is no trifling matter to stand up in the face of a congregation and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God in the name of the Redeemer: it is no easy thing to speak so plainly that the most ignorant may understand; so seriously that the deadest may feel; and so concerningly that contradictory cavillers may be silenced and awakened."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VII.

Ver. 1.—The absence of any fresh date, and the fact that it is simply tacked on to the previous chapter by the copulative conjunction, shows that what follows belongs to the same group. The use of the phrase, **the word of the Lord came unto me**, shows, however, that there was an interval of silence, perhaps of meditation, followed by a fresh influx of inspiration; and, so far as we may judge from the more lyrical character of the chapter, a more intense emotion.

Ver. 2.—An end, etc. The iteration of the word once more gives emphasis. The words read like an echo of Amos viii. 2. **The four corners** (Hebrew, "wings") were probably, as with us, the north, east, south, and west. The phrase had been used before in Isa. xi. 12, and the thought meets us again, in the form of the "four winds," in Dan. xi. 4; Zech. ii. 6; Matt. xxiv. 31; Mark xiii. 27. The "end" in this case is either that of the siege of Jerusalem, or that of the existence of Israel as a nation. It was now drawing nigh—was, as we say, within measurable distance.

Ver. 3.—Now is the end upon thee, etc. We note the repetition of this and ver. 4 in vers. 8, 9, as a kind of refrain in the lamentation. Stress is laid, and for the time laid exclusively, on the unpitying character of the Divine judgments. And this is followed as before, in ch. vi. 14, by "Ye shall know that I am the Lord." Fear must teach men the lesson which love had failed to teach.

Ver. 4.—Thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee, etc. These are, of course, primarily the idolatries of Israel. The people are to reap what they have sown. Their sins should be recognized in their punishment.

Ver. 5.—An evil, an only evil, etc. The words imply that the evil would be unique in character, attracting men's notice, not needing repetition. Cornill, however, following Luther, gives "evil after evil," changing one letter in the Hebrew for "one," so as to get the word "after." **For is come** read, with the Revised Version, *it cometh*. It is the nearness, not the actual arrival, of the end, that is in the prophet's thoughts. He writes in B.C. 595-4. Jerusalem was not taken till B.C. 588.

Ver. 6.—It watcheth for thee; better, with the Revised Version, *it awaketh against thee*. So the LXX., Vulgate, Luther. The Hebrew presents a paronomasia between the noun and verb—*hakketz*, *hekitz*—which cannot be reproduced in English. The destined doom is thought of as rousing itself to its appointed work. The word is cognate with that rendered "awaketh" in Ps. lxxviii. 65.

Ver. 7.—The morning is come unto thee, etc. In the only other passage in which the Hebrew noun occurs (Isa. xxviii. 5), it is translated "diadem," the meaning being strictly a circular ornament. Here the LXX. gives πλοκὴ, something twirled, out of which may come the meaning of the changes of fortune. Possibly, as in the familiar "wheel of fortune," that thought was involved in the circular form by itself. In the Talmud it appears as the name of the goddess of fate at Ascalon (Fürst). On the whole, I follow the Revised Version, Keil, and Ewald, in giving "thy doom." The "morning" of the Authorized Version probably rises from the thought that the dawn is, as it were, the glory and diadem of the day. The Vulgate gives *contritio*. **The day of trouble**; better, with the Revised Version, *of tumult*. The word is specially used of the noise of war (Isa. xxii. 5; Amos iii. 9; Zech. xiv. 3). **Not the sounding again upon the mountains.** The first noun is not found in the Old Testament, but a closely allied form appears in Isa. xvi. 9; Jer. xxv. 30; xlviii. 33, for the song of the vintage. Not that, the prophet says, shall be heard on the mountains, but in its place the cry of battle and the noise of war. The LXX. "not with travail-pangs," and the Vulgate *non gloriæ montium*, show that the word was in both cases a puzzle to the translators.

Vers. 8, 9.—The verses repeat, like the burden of a lyric ode, but end more emphatically, **ye shall know that I am Jehovah that smiteth.**

Ver. 10.—It is come. Read, as before, *it cometh*; and for morning, *doom* (see note on ver. 7). **The rod hath blossomed, etc.** The three verbs imply a climax. The "doom" springs out of the earth; the rod of vengeance blossoms (the word is the same as that which describes the blooming of Aaron's rod (Numb. xvii. 8), and the phrase was probably suggested by the history); pride (either that of the Chaldean ministers of vengeance, or of Israel as working out its own punishment; I incline to the latter) buds and bears fruit. In Isa. xxvii. 6 the word follows on "blossom," and therefore seems applicable to the formation of the fruit rather than the flower. (For the image of the rod, comp Ps. cx. 2; Isa. x. 26; Micah vi. 9.)

Ver. 11.—Violence is risen up, etc. The "violence" admits of the same twofold interpretation as the "pride" of ver. 10.

None of them shall remain. The interpolated verb, though grammatically necessary, weakens the force of the Hebrew. "None of them; none of their multitude; none of their wealth." **Neither shall there be wailing for them.** The noun is not found elsewhere. Taken, as the Authorized Version takes it, the thought, like that of ch. xxiv. 16 and Jer. xvi. 4, is that the usual rites of burial would be neglected, and that there would be "no widows to make lamentation" (Ps. lxxviii. 64). The Revised Version "eminency" implies the loss of all that constituted greatness. Cornill and the LXX. ("beauty" or "gaiety") practically agree with this. The Vulgate gives *requies*, and Fürst "a gathering, or tumult of the people." Probably the text is corrupt.

Ver. 12.—**Let not the buyer rejoice, etc.** We have to read, between the lines, the story of Ezekiel's companions in exile. They belonged, it will be remembered, to the nobler and wealthier class (2 Kings xxv. 19). They, it would seem, had been compelled to sell their estates at a price which made the "buyer rejoice and the seller mourn." In each case the joy and the sorrow would be but transient. **Wrath had gone out against the whole multitude.** In Micah ii. 2 and Isa. v. 8 we have parallel instances of the advantage taken by the rich of the distress of the old freeholders. In the story of Jer. xxxii. 6—16 we have, though from a very different point of view, the history of a like purchase, while the city was actually surrounded by the Chaldeans. The neglect of the sabbatic year (Jer. xxxiv. 8—17) makes it probable that the jubilee year also (if, indeed, it had ever been more than an ideal) had fallen into desuetude, and that the buyers comforted themselves with the thought that the land they had got, on cheap terms, would belong to them and their children for ever.

Ver. 13.—**For the seller shall not return, etc.** At first the thought seems only to add to the sorrow of the seller. He is told that he, at least, shall not return to his old estate. Even though they should be alive at the year of jubilee, their exile had to last its appointed time, Ezekiel's forty (ch. iv. 6) and Jeremiah's seventy years (Jer. xxv. 11). This, however, did not exclude the return of their children (Jer. xxxii. 44), and in the mean time all private sorrow would fall into the background as compared with the great public woe of the destruction of the holy city. **The vision is touching, etc.** The noun is used as a synonym for prophecy, as elsewhere (Isa. i. 1; Nah. i. 1; Hab. ii. 1). It may be noted that it is specially characteristic of Ezekiel (seven times) and Daniel (eleven times). For the Authorized Version read with the Revised Version, *none shall return*, or better (with the Vulgate and Keil), *the vision touching the whole multitude shall not return*, i.e. shall go straight onward to do its work (comp. Isa. lv. 11). So taken, there is a kind of play upon the iterated word: "The seller shall not turn his footsteps back, neither shall the prophecy." *Vestigia nulla retrorsum* shall be true of both. I take the other words, with the Revised Version, *no man in the iniquity of his life shall strengthen himself*, noting the fact that the word for "strengthen" is that which enters into Ezekiel's name. It is as though he said, "God is the only true source of strength to thee, as thy very name bears witness."

Ver. 14.—**They have blown the trumpet.** The word for "trumpet" is not found elsewhere, but the corresponding verb is used continually in connection with the trumpet of war, and Ezekiel seems to have coined the corresponding substantive, not, perhaps, without a reminiscence of Jer. vi. 1. There may possibly be an allusion to the trumpet-blowing with which the jubilee year (see ver. 13) was ushered in. The trumpet should sound, not for each man's return to his own estate, but for the alarm of war, and even then the consciousness of guilt will hinder men from arming themselves for battle (comp. Lev. xxvi. 36; Deut. xxviii. 25; xxxii. 30).

Ver. 15.—**The sword is without** (see ch. v. 12; vi. 12). Here there seems a more traceable fitness in assigning the pestilence as well as the famine to those who are shut up in the besieged city.

Ver. 16.—**They that escape, etc.** The sentence is virtually conditional. They that escape shall, it is true, in one sense, escape the immediate doom; but if so, it shall only be to the mountains. These were, in all times (Gen. xix. 17; Judg. vi. 2; 1 Sam. xiii. 6; Ps. xi. 1; 1 Macc. ii. 28; Matt. xxiv. 16; Mark xiii. 14), the natural refuge for those who fled from danger, but even this should fail those of whom the prophet speaks. They should be like the doves of the mountain-gorges, that are fluttered at the appearance of the eagle or the fowler, and seem by note (Isa. xxxviii. 14; lix. 11) and gesture (Nah. ii. 7), to be mourning for evermore. There also they shall lie, every man in his iniquity, and wailing for its punishment. We are reminded of Dante's similitudes in 'Inf.,' v. 40, 46, 82.

Ver. 17.—**All knees shall be weak as water**; literally, *shall flow with water*. So the Vulgate. The LXX. is yet stronger, *shall be defiled*, etc. The words may point to the cold sweat of terror which paralyzes men's power to act. The phrase is peculiar to Ezekiel, and meets us again in ch. xxi. 7. The thought finds a parallel in Isa. xiii. 7; Jer. vi. 24.

Ver. 18.—They shall also gird, etc. The words become more general, and include those who should remain in the city as well as the fugitives. For both there should be the inward feelings of horror and shame, and their outward symbols of sackcloth (Gen. xxxvii. 34; 2 Sam. iii. 31, 32; 2 Kings vi. 30; Isa. xv. 3; Jer. iv. 8, *et al.*) and baldness (Isa. iii. 24; xv. 2; xxii. 12; Amos viii. 10).

Ver. 19.—They shall cast their silver, etc. The words remind us of Isa. ii. 20 and xxx. 22, with the difference that here it is the silver and gold as such, and not the idols made of them, that are to be flung away. They had made the actual metal their idol, and their confidence in it should be powerless to deliver them (Zeph. i. 18). **Their gold shall be removed;** better, with the Revised Version, *as an unclean thing*. The word implies the kind of impurity of ch. xviii. 6; xxii. 10; xxxvi. 17; Isa. xxx. 22. Instead of gloating, as they had done, over their money, men should shrink from it, as though its very touch brought pollution. The Vulgate gives *in sterquilinium*, "to the dunghill." **They shall not satisfy their souls.** In the horrors of the siege, with everything at famine prices (2 Kings vi. 25), and little or nothing to be had for them, their money would not stop the cravings of hunger. It is characteristic that he applies to riches as such the very same epithet, **stumbling-block of their iniquity**, as he had applied before (ch. iii. 20) to actual idolatry (comp. Col. iii. 5).

Ver. 20.—As for the beauty of his ornament. The latter word is commonly used of the necklaces, armlets, etc., of women (Exod. xxxiii. 4—6; Isa. xlix. 18; Jer. ii. 32; iv. 30). So again in ch. xvi. 7, 11; xxiii. 40. The singular is used of the people collectively, or of each man individually, like German *man* or French *on*. **He set it in majesty;** better, *he*—or to give the sense *they—turned it to pride*. Wealth and art had ministered, as in Isa. ii. 16, first to mere pride and pomp; then they made out of their ornaments the idols which they worshipped, and which were now, the same emphatic word being repeated, as a pollution to them.

Ver. 21.—I will give it. The "it" refers to the silver and gold, the "beauty of the ornaments" thus desecrated in their use. **The strangers,** *i.e.* the Chaldean invaders, should in their turn pollute (better, with the Revised Version, *profane it*) by making it their prey. For them the idols which Israel had worshipped would be simply as booty to be plundered.

Ver. 22.—My secret place. The work of the spoiler would not stop at the idols of silver and gold. Jehovah would surrender his own "secret place" (*secret treasure* in margin of Revised Version), that over which he had watched, *sc.* the sanctuary of his temple, to the hands of the spoiler. In Ps. lxxxiii. 4 the same adjective is used of persons, the "hidden" or protected ones of God. In the name of Baal-zephon, "Lord of the secret place," we have possibly a kindred thought. In Ps. xvii. 14 we have "hid treasure."

Ver. 23.—Make a chain; better, *the chain*. The word is not found elsewhere, but a kindred form is thus translated in 1 Kings vi. 21. Looking to the force of the verbs from which it is formed, its special meaning is that of a coupling-chain, such as would be used in the case of captives marched off to their place of exile (Nah. iii. 10). All previous sufferings were to culminate in this. The φυρμόν of the LXX. and the *fac conclusionem* of the Vulgate show that the word perplexed them. **Full of bloody crimes.** The only passage in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament in which the English noun occurs. **Literally,** *judgments of blood*. The words may be equivalent either (1) to "blood-guiltiness" (compare the "judgment" in Jer. li. 9), or (2) to judgment perverted into judicial murder. The latter finds support in ch. ix. 9. In either case it is noticeable that Ezekiel points not only to idolatry, but to violence and wrong, as the sins that had cried for punishment (comp. Jer. xxii. 17 as a contemporary witness).

Ver. 24.—The worst of the heathen; literally, *evil ones of the nations*—with the superlative implied rather than expressed. For the thought, comp. Deut. xxviii. 50; Lam. v. 11—13; Jer. vi. 23. The Chaldeans were probably most prominent in the prophet's thoughts, but ch. xxxv. 5 and Ps. cxxxvii. 7 suggest that there was a side glance at the Edomites. **The pomp of the strong, etc.** Another echo of Lev. xxvi. (ver. 31). The "pomp" is that of Judah trusting in her strength. The "holy places" find their chief representative in the temple, but, as the word is used also of a non-Jehovistic worship (ch. xxviii. 18; Amos vii. 9), may include whatever the people looked on as sanctuaries—the "high places" and the like. The Vulgate gives *possidebunt sanctuaria;* the Revised Version margin, *they that sanctify them;* but the Authorized Version is probably right in both cases. Luther renders *ihre kirchen*, which reminds us of Acts xix. 37.

Ver. 25.—They shall seek peace, etc. The noun is probably to be taken in its wider sense as including safety and prosperity, but may also include specific overtures for peace made to the Chaldean generals.

Ver. 26.—Mischief . . . rumour The

combination reminds us of the "wars and rumours of wars" of Matt. xxiv. 6. The floating uncertain reports of a time of invasion aggravate the actual misery (comp. Isa. xxxvii. 7; Jer. li. 46; Obad. ver. 1). **They shall seek a vision of the prophet, etc.** The words paint a picture of political chaos and confusion. The people turn in their distress to the three representatives of wisdom—the prophet as the bearer of an immediate message from Jehovah, the priest as the interpreter of his Law (Mal. ii. 7), the "ancients" or "elders" as those who had learnt the lessons of experience,—and all alike in vain. (For illustrative facts, see Jer. v. 31; vi. 13; xxi. 2; xxiii. 21—40; xxvii. 9—18; xxviii. 1—9, and generally Micah iii. 6; Amos viii. 11; 1 Sam. xxviii. 6; Lam. ii. 9.)

Ver. 27.—The king shall mourn, etc. The picture reminds us of Jehoram in 2 Kings vi. 30. The action of Zedekiah in Jer. xxi. 1 and xxxiv. 8 makes it probable enough that it was actually reproduced. A solemn litany procession like that of Joel i. 13, 14 and ii. 15—17 would have been quite in keeping with his character. **The prince shall clothe himself, etc.** The noun is specially characteristic of Ezekiel, who uses it thirty-four times. In ch. xii. 12 the "prince" seems identified with the "king." Here it may mean either the heir to the throne, or the chief ruler under the king. **The people of the land, etc.** The phrase is perhaps used, as the Jewish rabbis afterwards used it, with a certain touch of scorn, for the labouring class. All the upper class had been carried away captive with Jehoiachin (2 Kings xxiv. 14). Compare Ezekiel's use of it in ch. xxxiii. 2; xlvi. 3, 9. **I will do unto them, etc.** The chapter, or rather the whole section from ch. i. 1 onwards, ends with an iterated assertion of the equity of the Divine judgments. **Then also they shall know that I am the Lord,** Almighty and all-righteous.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—"*The end is come.*" I. THE END THAT SURELY COMES. Time is broken into periods; and every period, long or short, has its certain end. The tale of life is written in many chapters, each with its own appropriate conclusion; in some cases the conclusion is violent, abrupt, and startling. We are surprised out of an old settled course. The mill stops suddenly, and then the silence is alarming. There are the greater epochs of life, when a whole volume of experience is closed, and another must be opened, till at length we reach *Finis*. But every day has its sunset. Every year runs out to December and dies its wintry death, in spite of all the festivities of Christmas. Youth is fleeting; its sweet spring-time fast melts, its blossoms fade and fall. Life itself runs out and reaches an end. As each period goes it vanishes, never to return. Thus Christina Rossetti writes—

"Come, gone,—gone for ever;
Gone as an unreturning river;
Gone as to death, the merriest liver;
Gone as the year at the dying fall,
To-morrow, to-day, yesterday, never:
Gone once for all."

1. There is an end to the *day of work*. "The night cometh, wherein no man can work." The opportunity will pass. Let us make the most of our strength and time while we have them. 2. There is an end to *the freedom of sin*. The orgies of mad self-indulgence will not last for ever. They burn themselves out in folly and shame. Then comes the end, and after that the reckoning. 3. There is an end to the *discipline of sorrow*. The pain will not last for ever. The doubt and mystery and darkness are not eternal. The Christian pilgrimage is long and weary, but it is not an infinite, endless course. The wilderness is wide, and the goal far off. But the way will end at last in the heavenly city, the home of the soul.

II. THE END THAT SHOULD COME. There are some things which we should do well to end, yet still they are with us. 1. An end should come to *our life of sin*. The old sin has been our companion for years, a bad companion, corrupt and corrupting. It is time we and it parted. It is time we turned over a new leaf and began a better way. The old self has lived too long. Let it die and be buried. 2. An end should come to *our indecision*. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" This hesitation has lasted too long. "Choose you *this day* whom ye will serve." 3. An end should come to the *gloom of doubt*, *the coldness of half-hearted service*, *the lethargy and paralysis of* *an unspiritual religion.* "The night is far spent; the day is at hand;" "Awake, thou that sleepest!"

III. THE END THAT MAY COME. We contemplate possible endings which we would fain avert, but which seem to be approaching. 1. Some of these endings are *within our power,* and should be kept off. We should guard against an end to our early faith and zeal. Ephraim's goodness, which was like the morning cloud, was soon dissipated. Of some it must be said the end has come to their fervent devotion and self-sacrificing service. Once they were bright lights of the Church, but they have waned, and are approaching spiritual night. 2. Some of these endings are *beyond our control.* The home circle may be broken, the dear countenances of the loved may smile upon us no more. For the old fulness of friendship we may have left only blankness and vacancy, and a bitter sense of loss. The very freshness of our soul may be lost too, and then we look back to the old sweet years, and wonder how we could have taken them so quietly.

IV. THE END THAT WILL NEVER COME. 1. There will never be an end to the *righteous Law of God.* Right and truth are eternal. We can never outlive their claims. If we continue for ever in opposition to them, their pains and penalties must be always ours. 2. The *love of God* will never end. Modes of Divine operations may change as circumstances alter, and new dispensations may succeed to old dispensations—new covenants taking the place of old covenants. But God does not change. There is no end to him. He abideth faithful. In the wreck of the universe the Rock of Ages remains unshaken. Love in his essence, God never wearies in helping and blessing. There is no end to his grace. "The mercy of the Lord endureth for ever." Whenever the helpless, penitent prodigal returns, he will find his Father waiting to welcome him. 3. *The eternal life* can have no end. The body dies. Happily there will be an end to that. But the life in God abides for ever. In that life many things thought to be ended here on earth will be recovered and will revive. Thus our past experience is not utterly lost. It lives in memory and in what it has made us. A German poet writes—

> "Yesterday I loved;
> To-day I suffer;
> To-morrow I die.
> But I shall gladly,
> To-day and to-morrow
> Think on yesterday."

Ver. 10.—"*The day is come.*" This chapter opened with a prophecy of "an end." It now proceeds to the annunciation of a new beginning. No end is absolutely final. In the night which sees the death of one day a new day is born.

I. THE FUTURE BECOMES PRESENT. The much-anticipated day at length arrives. We are thus for ever overtaking the future. However far the future event may be, it will surely be reached, if time is the only impediment to be got over. The day of death may be far ahead, but most assuredly it will come. The dreaded day will come only too swiftly. The hoped-for day will also dawn, though we become weary in waiting for it. God's great day of doom will arrive, though the sinner mock at its tarrying. Christ's glorious day of triumph will also appear, though the Church grow faint and wonders at its slow approach.

II. THE NEW DAY WILL BE REVEALED BY ITS OWN ADVENT. No prediction can exactly describe the coming day, for no words can paint the thing that has not been. We vainly try to anticipate the future, and we blunder into the greatest mistakes. We cannot know what sorrow is till the day of sorrow breaks, nor can we understand the joy of the Lord till a glad day of heavenly love smiles upon us. We shall not know death till we are in the day of death. When the new day of the life beyond dawns we shall know its meaning as we can never guess now.

III. THE COMING DAY WILL HAVE A NEW CHARACTER. No two days are exactly alike. Ezekiel was announcing a day of doom. The awful thunders of that day are to roll over the heads of guilty and impenitent men with a surprise and a horror never anticipated in easier times. Thus it was in the doom of Israel under the Babylonian invasion. But there are brighter days to anticipate. There is the day of light after the night of doubt; the day of joy's sunshine succeeding the night of sorrow's weeping; the day of penitent new beginnings after the night of sin; the day of busy service after the night of rest and waiting. Carlyle writes—

"Lo! here hath been dawning
Another blue day:
Think, wilt thou let it
Slip useless away?

"Out of eternity
This new day is born;
Into eternity
At night will return.

"Behold it aforetime
No eye ever did;
So soon it for ever
From all eyes is hid."

IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE NEW DAY IS DETERMINED BY OUR CONDUCT IN THE OLD DAYS. The day of doom is not the day of fate. It is a day of judgment, *i.e.* of examination, discrimination, and consequent decision. Therefore it is determined by the character of the old days it judges. The new day may come to us as a surprise, but it will not fall out by chance as one of storm or one of sunshine. When it arrives we shall see that, in its deepest character, it bears the record of our own past.

Ver. 12.—*Buyer and seller.* I. RELIGION HAS A RIGHT TO BE CONCERNED WITH COMMERCE. Religion is spiritual, but it aims at filling the secular sphere, as the soul fills the body. The Church may be its centre, as the brain is the centre of the soul's consciousness; but every region of life is a scene for its operation, as every limb of the body is for the action of the soul. Religion claims a place in the shop, in the factory, in the mine, on the highway of the sea, in the noisy streets and markets of the city. She does not claim this place as a mere spectator or guest, to be respected in name, but not followed with obedience, like the statue of a deceased citizen set up in a public place to honour his memory, although his principles are derided and travestied by the throng of present-day men who crowd about it. Religion claims to be a living presence, guiding and controlling commerce. The relations of buyer and seller are too often treated on the ground of pure self-interest—self-interest of the lowest kind, mere money profit. Religion should inspire higher motives. 1. *A respect for truth and justice.* A Christian merchant's word should be as good as his bond in his counting-house as well as in his home. It is scandalous that "trust" can only go with "security." Christian honour should pay the debt that cannot be exacted by law. The bankrupt who listens to the teachings of Christ will not be content to scrape through the courts by the aid of technicalities which only enable him to cheat his creditors. The Christian seller will not deceive the buyer, nor the Christian buyer take advantage of the difficulties of the seller to drive an unfair bargain. Justice means more than keeping the law—it means fair dealing and equal treatment. 2. *A recognition of human brotherhood.* If I recognize my neighbour as a brother when at church, can I pounce upon him as my prey in the world? The "golden rule" belongs to commerce as much as to any other part of life. But it will not be effective till a spirit of co-operation takes the place of one of cruel, hard, selfish competition. 3. *A reverence for the rights of God in the fruits of commerce.* Over the Royal Exchange, in London, there runs, in great and bold letters, the legend, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." How far is that the text of the words and deeds of the men who throng the streets round this public building? If all in the earth belongs to God, we shall have to give him an account of our trade transactions.

II. COMMERCE WITHOUT RELIGION WILL NOT SECURE THE WELFARE OF A PEOPLE. People who prefer Mammon to God will find they have chosen a hard master. 1. *When commerce is prosperous, it will not satisfy the greatest needs of men.* Man does not live by bread alone, and certainly he cannot subsist on bankers' accounts. In Jerusalem the buyer and seller would cease to rejoice over their bargains, would even not care for loss or gain, glad if only they escaped with their lives. The best things cannot be bought with money; but, happily, they can be had "without money and without price." 2. *When national calamity comes, commerce fails.* The commercial barometer is a most sensitive test of approaching political storms. Wickedness in business is deservedly punished in the general calamity of a nation by the collapse of trade that is certain to be one of the first results of the adversity. 3. *Commercial sin will be justly punished with commercial ruin.* This does not necessarily happen to the individual trader who may die rich with ill-gotten gains; but history proves it to be true in the long run with nations.

Ver. 16.—*Mourning as doves.* The fugitives from Jerusalem flee to the mountains and hide themselves there, like the doves in the valleys below, whose melancholy notes seem to be a suitable echo to their own sad feelings.

I. NATURE INTERPRETS MAN TO HIMSELF. There is an interpretation of nature by man; there is also an interpretation of man by nature. The glad sights and sounds of spring are commentaries on the fresh joyousness of youth. We should not know the hope and beauty of life so well if May never came. So, also, storm, night, winter, desert, mountain, and raging torrent open the heart of man's grief and despair, and reveal its desolation. The key to human passion is there. Wordsworth, the prophet of nature, who saw deepest into her secret, discerned among the woods and hills "the still, sad music of humanity."

II. SORROW IS RELIEVED BY CONGENIAL SCENES OF NATURE. The mourning exiles will note the melancholy tones of the doves of the valley. To the happy these sounds come as a touching variation from the generally pleasing aspect of nature; but to the sorrowful fugitives among the mountains they express the sympathy of nature. It is well to cultivate this sympathy, which is not all imaginative; "for there is a spirit in the woods," and hills and valleys are filled with a Divine presence.

III. IN THE SECLUSION OF NATURE THE DEEPER FEELINGS OF THE SOUL FIND VENT. While among the mountains the exiles utter their lamentations. In the city, scenes of warfare, bloodshed, fury, and terror absorb all attention. These are the immediate and the coarser experiences in a season of great calamity. For the time they destroy the power of reflection. But in solitude and silence men have leisure to think. Then the sadness of the soul wakes up, and takes the place of the agitation and distress of external circumstances.

IV. THE SORROW OF MAN IS DEEPER THAN THE MELANCHOLY OF NATURE. While the doves coo in plaintive notes that suggest to the hearer a feeling of grief, though they are not really mourning, the exiles from Jerusalem respond to the natural notes of the doves with utterances of true sorrow. Man is greater than nature. He has self-consciousness and conscience. He knows his trouble and he knows his sin. He pays the penalty of his higher endowments in the greater depth of his fall and shame and sorrow. The whole range of nature's experiences is slight by the side of the lofty aspirations and profound griefs of man. Going from the one to the other is like leaving the soft, undulating landscape of England for the cliffs and chasms and dark valleys and the awful mountain-peaks of Switzerland. The chief difference is moral. Man alone has conscience; he only can mourn for sin. This grief *for sin*—and not merely grief on account of its penalties—is one of the deepest experiences of the human heart. It puts leagues of space between the men who mourn *like* doves, and the innocent, simple birds whose notes suggest a grief they can never feel. But in this deeper grief is man's hope. Mourning for sin is a part of repentance, and it points to the day of better things, when God has forgiven his guilty children, and when the mourning doves will be forgotten, and the singing of the lark at heaven's gate will be the key to a new experience of heavenly gladness.

Ver. 19.—*Gold and silver.* Gold and silver are here referred to as precious things that have become worthless in the confusion consequent on the sack of Jerusalem. Inasmuch as they are usually regarded as of great value and guarded with especial care, kept in purses and safe places, to throw them in the streets is to reverse the normal treatment of them.

I. THE VALUE OF GOLD AND SILVER IS NOT STABLE. Financially, this fact is recognized in the Money Market, but it goes further than men of business generally admit. The precious metals have a certain utility and beauty of their own; but there are circumstances under which they become mere incumbrances; *e.g.* on board a sinking ship, in a besieged city, on a desert island, in great sickness, at death. They are chiefly valued as money, *i.e.* as a medium of exchange. But when there is nothing to exchange them for, their money value is lost. This must be the case in a state of social insecurity, when no one can depend upon holding his property from one day to another. Then the purchasing power of money will fall, even though there be plenty of articles for sale, because the purchase of goods may be nullified by the loss of them. In a famine at first the rich man may buy dear food which the poor man cannot afford to get; but when all the food is exhausted, he cannot feed on his gold and silver. In times of great sorrow the value of gold and silver falls almost to *nil.* It will not supply the vacant place of the dead, nor will it heal the smart of unkindness or ingratitude. He is poor indeed whose wealth consists in nothing better than gold and silver. The worship of Mammon is a miserable idolatry, certain to be most fatal to the most devoted worshipper—and, alas! how many such our money-loving age produces! What Wordsworth wrote of the plutocracy of his day is little less true now.

> "The wealthiest man among us is the best:
> No grandeur now in nature or in book
> Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,
> This is idolatry: and these we adore:
> Plain living and high thinking are no more:
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
> And pure religion breathing household laws."

II. THERE ARE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LEAD TO THE ABANDONMENT OF GOLD AND SILVER. 1. *Necessity.* "All that a man hath will he give for his life." The drowning man will drop his money-bags rather than be dragged down to death with them. Yet there are men who behave as slaves to their money, consenting to a slow death of exhaustion from devotion to business rather than preserve health and life at the cost of pecuniary loss. 2. *Folly.* Extravagant people "cast their silver in the streets." Money spent in sin is worse than lost; it is invested in funds from which the dividends will be pain and death. 3. *Charity.* There are the poor of the streets, and the rich and well-clad man who sees his brethren shivering and hungry has a good call to cast his silver in the streets—not, indeed, for a loose scramble in which the most worthless will seize most, not in indiscriminate charity which breeds idle paupers and neglects modest poverty, but in wise and thoughtful alleviation of misery. The young man whom Jesus loved was bidden to sell all and give to the poor (Matt. xix. 21). St. Francis of Assissi and many another did so. Those who do not practise this "counsel of perfection" should see the duty of making real sacrifices for their brethren as for Christ (Matt. xxv. 40). 4. *Consecration.* Men may cast aside their care of wealth, and even let the proceeds lie in neglect while they devote themselves to a higher ministry; or they may bring their wealth and lay it at the feet of Christ, to be spent on his work in the streets of earth.

Ver. 26 (first part).—*Rumour.* "And rumour shall be upon rumour." One element of the dark times of the destruction of Jerusalem is the constant accession of new and terrifying rumours—one contradicting another, yet all presaging fearful events. This is always an accompaniment of times of unrest, and Christ referred to it in his picture of coming evils (Matt. xxiv. 6). We may have seen some such thing in our own happier days; but the telegraph and the newspaper have done immense service in substituting authentic news for vague and floating rumour, so that it is difficult for us to understand the distress of less rapidly informed ages, which must have been far more the prey to uncorroborated reports and chance rumours.

I. THE MISCHIEF OF RUMOUR. 1. *Rumour distresses by its prophecy of coming evil.* There may be rumours of good, to cheer. But in the present instance we have only rumours of evil brought to our attention. Such reports cloud the present with dim visions of a possible dark future. It is hard enough to face the difficulties of to-day; add to these the portents of to-morrow, and the load may be crushing. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." 2. *Rumour alarms by its vagueness.* Rumour is not news, not the picture of the distant, but only its shadow. If we knew the worst, we might know how to prepare for it; but rumour comes with large, general adumbrations, leaving us to fill in the details with imaginary horrors. 3. *Rumour confuses us by its contradictoriness.* Rumour is to follow "upon rumour." There is to be a succession of reports. Possibly these might confirm one another. But general experience would suggest that they are more likely to conflict one with another. The result is a chaos of impressions and a paralysis of energy. 4. *Rumour exaggerates evil.* It is rarely, if ever, true to fact. It is like the snowball, that grows as it rolls.

II. OUR DUTY IN REGARD TO RUMOUR. 1. *We should be careful how we spread a rumour.* First, it is necessary to ascertain that we receive it on good authority. Then it is important to guard against adding our reflections and impressions as parts of the original report. If the rumour be one calculated to do harm it may be well to keep it to ourselves. No good comes of scandalmongery. A vulgar sense of self-importance delights in telling shocking news; but the motive is a low one, and the action may be most unkind. Panics spring from rumour. When a thoughtless person cries "Fire!" in a public place, he cannot answer for the consequences of his rash and perhaps fatal folly. We need self-restraint to prevent the mischievous spread of rumour.

"Rumour is a pipe
Blown by surmises, jealousies, conjectures;
And of so easy and so plain a stop,
That the blunt monster with uncounted head
The still-discordant wavering multitude,
Can play upon it."

2. *We should be on our guard against yielding to rumour.* It wants courage and strength to resist this influence, especially when our neighbours are carried away by it. But past experience should teach caution. We have better than rumour to follow in seeking our highest interest. "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." We have "the more sure word of prophecy," and the inward personal experience of the soul with God. Christianity is not based on a rumour of ghost-stories; it stands on the historical facts of gospel history and on Christian experience.

Ver. 26 (latter part).—*A vain search.* "Then they shall seek a vision," etc. Ezekiel describes the vain search for the assistance of a prophet's vision in the dark days of Israel's overthrow, and the utter failure of that search, as one of the features of the dreadful time.

I. THE SEARCH. The words of true prophecy were not much valued by the careless people in their hours of ease; but when trouble came natural anxiety and superstitious terror combined to drive them to the sacred oracles. The question arises—What did they wish to learn from the prophets? There is no indication that they desired to know the will of God and to be directed back into his way. More probably they were simply consumed with a morbid curiosity as to their approaching doom. Was it certain that the nation must be scattered? Now, little good can come from such inquiries. A search into the deep mysteries of the future is not likely to give us any very helpful results. It is in God's most merciful method of educating his children, to keep the future hidden, for the most part, and to give just so much light as is needed for the day. There is, however, a better side to this search. Trouble breaks through the thin crust of worldliness, and reveals the essentially spiritual character of man and his needs Then it is not possible to be satisfied with things seen and temporal. The unseen world that has been slighted in prosperous times is felt to be supremely real and of profoundest interest. So the sorrow-stricken soul searches for some voice out of the darkness beyond.

II. THE LOSS. The search proves to be vain and useless. The oracle is dumb; the prophet sees no vision; the Law perishes; counsel ceases. This is a disappointment for the boasting confidence of the people (Jer. xviii. 18). 1. *There is no new inspiration.* Revelation did not continue to come in an unbroken stream of light. There were periods of darkness in the history of Israel, when no new word of God was given. The completion of the Bible has put an end to this kind of revelation. Yet there is the inspiring guidance of God's eternal Spirit and the opening of the eyes of spiritually minded men to a personal knowledge and to new aspects of truth. If this ceases, though the letter of revelation remains, the quickening spirit is lost. 2. *The old written word is lost.* Not only is there no prophet's vision; even the ancient Law perishes from the priest. The ceremonial of the temple was stopped by Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. This was very different from the final cessation of it when the Jewish economy had passed away. Now the loss of the Law was premature. It would be paralleled by our loss of the whole Bible and its guidance—a thing that happened practically in the Middle Ages. 3. *Tradition fails.* This counsel of the ancients is lost in the confusion of the scattered people. There are floating beliefs and customs of religion that help and influence us unconsciously. In a broken, disordered condition even these advantages may be lost.

III. THE SIN. The lamentable condition was part of the punishment of Israel's sin. *This was the abuse of Law and prophecy.* The law of the ritual had been followed as a mere form, and trusted without moral obedience (Isa. i. 10—15). Such a desecration of religion may be justly punished by the loss of its aid. Perhaps this would be the most merciful way to bring people to appreciate eternal verities. If all our Bibles were lost, should we value them more, and crave the recovery of them with a new relish? With Israel, prophecy was degraded till the popular prophets became mere echoes of popular opinions. Then they were deceivers of the people, and not only did they deserve to be swept away, but the loss of them was a merciful deliverance to the deluded nation. There is a teaching which can be well spared, especially in view of a higher gospel.

"Ring out the old,
  Ring in the new;
Ring out the false,
  Ring in the true."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—*Recompense.* All earthly government presumes the ideas of responsibility and retribution. Human nature itself contains what may be regarded as their conditions and elements. The welfare, and indeed in certain stages the very existence, of society renders recompense a necessity. What is true of human relations has truth also in reference to those that are Divine. The parallel, indeed, is not complete, but it is real.

I. RECOMPENSE IMPLIES A FREE AND RESPONSIBLE NATURE ON THE PART OF MAN. There can be no recompense where there is no accountability; and there can be no accountability where there is no intelligence, no freedom. Natural objects, Kant tells us, act according to laws; spiritual beings, according to representation of laws. Man is capable of apprehending and approving moral ordinances prescribed for his guidance and control; he can recognize moral authority. And he is distinguished from unintelligent and involuntary natures in that he can obey or disobey the laws which he apprehends. If this were not so, consequences might indeed ensue from action; but recompense would be an impossibility.

II. RECOMPENSE PRESUMES THAT THERE IS ON THE PART OF GOD NO INDIFFERENCE, BUT DEEP CONCERN, WITH REGARD TO MAN'S MORAL CHARACTER AND CONDUCT. If we think chiefly of law, or uniformity of action, we cannot but remember that law does not account for itself; if we think of the Lawgiver, we are constrained to recognize purpose in all his proceedings and provisions. It cannot be imagined that the great Ruler of all inflicts suffering for any delight in seeing his creatures suffer, or even that he regards their sufferings with perfect indifference. There must be a governmental, a moral end to be secured. The Lawgiver and Judge has what, in the case of a man, we should call a deep interest in the condition and action of the children of men.

III. RECOMPENSE IMPLIES THE POSSESSION BY THE SUPREME GOVERNOR OF THE ATTRIBUTES WHICH QUALIFY FOR THE EXERCISE OF JUDICIAL FUNCTIONS. None but an omniscient Ruler can be acquainted with all the secret springs of action, as well as with all the varied circumstances of life; yet without such knowledge, how can recompense be other than imperfect and uncertain? None but a perfectly impartial Ruler can administer justice which shall be undisputed and indisputable: who but

God is stainlessly and conspicuously just? All earthly retribution is open to suspicion for the simple reason that every human judge acts upon partial knowledge, and is liable to be influenced by prejudice. But as from the Divine tribunal there is no appeal, so with the Divine decisions can no fault be found. The Judge of all the earth will surely and in every case do right.

IV. RECOMPENSE AS A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE OPERATING IN HIS LIFE WAS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHOSEN PEOPLE. The Old Testament has been written to little purpose for those who do not recognize the action of retributive Providence; the narrative would be meaningless apart from this moral significance. The position of Ezekiel compelled him to trace the hand of God in the life and fortunes of his nation. For the Captivity in the East was an unmistakable instance of God's judicial interposition. And if this was the most striking instance, others occur in abundance, witnessing to the fact that this earthly state is a scene of moral government, incomplete, indeed, yet not to be denied as real.

V. RECOMPENSE IS A PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSAL PREVALENCE IN GOD'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE AFFAIRS OF MANKIND. Doubtless the history of the children of Israel is intended to teach, among other lessons, in a very especial manner, the lesson of Divine government and human responsibility. Not only is the story told, but its moral significance is expressly set forth. Yet the great principles which are explicit in Old Testament history are implied in all history—in the history of every nation which exists upon earth. Go where we may, we do not and cannot go beyond the sphere of Divine retribution. Everywhere "the way of transgressors is hard," and "the wages of sin is death."

VI. RECOMPENSE IS A PRINCIPLE OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT WHICH, WHEN ITS ENDS ARE ANSWERED, ADMITS OF BEING TEMPERED WITH MERCY. It is observable that, in the prophetic writings, we find no unqualified denunciation. Threats of severe punishment are met with; but they are followed by offers of mercy and promises of pardon to the penitent. The gates of hope are not closed upon the sinner. And if the most complete and glorious manifestation of God's character is to be found in the gospel of Christ, it must be remembered that, whilst that gospel was occasioned by man's ruin by sin and his liability to punishment, it was intended to secure man's salvation and deliverance "from the wrath to come."—T.

Ver. 16.—*Mourning.* This chapter has justly been termed rather a dirge than a prophecy. Whilst its language is in some respects special to the experience of the children of Israel, such representations as this may well be applied to all those who have forsaken God, and have turned every man to his own way.

I. THERE IS ABUNDANT OCCASION FOR MOURNING ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO HAVE SINNED AND WHO ENDURE THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN.

II. IT IS ONLY A NATURE IN SOME MEASURE SENSITIVE AND SUSCEPTIBLE OF BETTER FEELING WHICH IS CAPABLE OF MOURNING. How truly has it been said that "the worst of feeling is to feel all feeling die"! "They that lack time to mourn lack time to mend."

III. MOURNING FOR SIN IS MINGLED WITH SELF-REPROACH AND HORROR. They who mourn because they have lost what was precious to them, especially because they have been bereaved of such as they held dear, may mourn tranquilly and holily, and with a patient submission to the will of God. But they who "mourn, every one for his iniquity," cannot but feel conscience-stricken because of their personal participation in sin, and their personal guilt for sin; they cannot but accuse themselves, and pass judgment, as it were, upon their own wrong-doing and folly.

IV. SUCH MOURNING IS AGGRAVATED BY THE NUMBER OF THOSE PARTICIPATING IN IT. The prophet compares the conscience-stricken remnant, distressed and weeping because of their own and their nation's iniquities, to a flight of doves uttering their doleful lamentations. It is no exceptional, singular case; multitudes are involved in the common fate, the common trouble. The feeling is heightened by sympathy. When all heads are bowed in confession, when the utterance of contrition rises from many afflicted hearts, when a contagion of sorrow and distress passes through a vast congregation of humble and penitent worshippers, each is the better able to realize his own and the common distress, and to unburden the over-laden heart.

V. **SINCERE MOURNING MAY LEAD TO TRUE REPENTANCE, AND MAY ISSUE IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.** There is a "godly sorrow which worketh repentance"—a sorrow which is not only or chiefly because of the painful results of sin, but because of the very evil itself which is in sin, and because it is an offence against a forbearing and gracious God. Where such sorrow is, there can be no despair. The rainbow of hope spans the cloud, dark and heavy though it be.—T.

Ver. 19.—*The limitations to the power of wealth.* The description of the text is remarkably picturesque. We seem to behold the panic-stricken remnant escaping from the city with trembling forms and anxious countenances. Horror and shame impel their flight, as, girded in coarse sackcloth, they hurry away, barely hoping that they may save their lives. As they go, in their terror they cast away their silver and gold, the burden of which may impede their flight, and which have lost their interest in the all-absorbing endeavour to escape from the hands of the foe. The action thus graphically described is suggestive of a great principle.

I. **THE WEALTHY ARE USUALLY PRONE TO PLACE TOO GREAT RELIANCE UPON THEIR RICHES.** Money can purchase many things, and it is not surprising that the rich should have a latent belief that it can procure for them everything that they may need.

II. **THE VANITY OF SUCH RESOURCES BECOMES MANIFEST EVEN IN ORDINARY EARTHLY CALAMITIES.** In sickness, in sorrow of heart, in many calamities, especially in distressing bereavement, the powerlessness of wealth to deliver or to aid is made painfully apparent. In how many circumstances are the rich and the poor almost upon a level! How often would the wealthy be glad to exchange their riches for the poor man's poverty, might they enjoy the poor man's health!

III. **SUCH POWERLESSNESS IS YET MORE EVIDENT IN THE PRESENCE OF SUCH CALAMITIES AS ARE THE SIGN OF DIVINE DISPLEASURE.** Judah was fated to experience the catastrophe designated by the prophet as "the day of the wrath of the Lord." This awful expression conveys a distinct declaration concerning the Divine government, concerning human responsibility for rebellion and defection. From this wrath no worldly agency could possibly deliver. In the day when the Eternal enters into judgment with the sons of men, earth can offer no immunity, no protection. Release, exemption from righteous judgment can be purchased by no treasures, no gifts, no sacrifice.

IV. **WEALTH, WHEN ABUSED, MAY EVEN BE A DISADVANTAGE AND HINDRANCE TO ITS POSSESSOR.** In a shipwreck, in a fire, in flight from a besieged or captured city, men have been known, by clutching their gold and burdening themselves with its weight, to lose their chance of escape, and consequently miserably to perish. Their wealth has been their stumbling-block. Such action and such a fate are a picture, a figure, of the conduct and the doom of not a few. They trust in uncertain riches instead of trusting in the living God. They make an idol of their possessions. That which they might have used for good ends they misuse to their own destruction.

V. **HENCE APPEARS THE REASONABLENESS, THE WISDOM, OF SEEKING BETTER RESOURCES AND MAKING BETTER PROVISION FOR THE DAY OF TRIAL.** Silver and gold must fail their possessor; the time must come when they will be cast aside. But there are true riches; there is a steadfast and unfailing prop; there are riches of Divine mercy and compassion. It is not what a man *has*, it is what a man *is*, which is of supreme concern. He who has repented of sin and forsaken sin, who has sought and obtained through Christ acceptance with God, whose attitude towards the great King is no longer an attitude of opposition and rebellion, but one of subjection and obedience, he only can look forward with calm confidence to the day of trial; for he knows whom he has trusted, and is persuaded that the Lord will keep that which he has committed to him against that day.—T.

Ver. 22.—*The averted face.* In the figurative but natural and expressive language of the Hebrews, the *shining* of God's countenance means his good pleasure and good will towards those whom he favours, and the *hiding* or *averting* of his countenance means his displeasure. Prayer often shaped itself into the familiar expression, "The Lord cause his face to shine upon us;" and the displeasure of Heaven was deprecated in such terms as these: "Turn not thy face from thy servants." The child distinguishes at once between the smile and the frown of the parent; the courtier is at no loss to discriminate between the welcome and favour and the displeasure apparent upon the monarch's face. To the mind at all sensitive to the moral beauty and glory of God, no sentence can be so dreadful as that uttered in the simple but terrible language of the text, "My face will I turn also from them."

I. IN THE SHINING OF GOD'S COUNTENANCE IS LIFE AND JOY. When the sun arises in his strength, and floods the hills and the valleys, the rivers and the forests, the cornfields and the meadows, with his glorious rays, nature returns the smiles, glows in the sunbeams, rejoices in the warmth and the illumination. Where the sun shines brightly, there the colours are radiant, the odour delicious, there the music of the grove is sweet and the harvest of the plain is golden, there life is luxuriant and gladness breaks forth into laughter and song. And in the moral, the spiritual realm, it is the sunlight of God's countenance, the manifestation of God's favour, which calls forth and sustains all spiritual life, health, peace, and joy. "In thy favour is life."

II. MAN'S UNBELIEF AND SIN OCCASION THE HIDING AND WITHDRAWING OF GOD'S COUNTENANCE. The change is not in him; it is in us. When the sun is not seen in the sky, it is not because he no longer shines, but because clouds, mists, or smoke, ascending from the earth, come between the orb of day and the globe which he illumines. So if God turns his face from an individual, a city, a people, it is because their sins have risen up as a dense, foul fog, intervening between them and a holy, righteous God. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." So it was with those against whom the Prophet Ezekiel was called upon to testify. So it is with multitudes whom the ministers of Christ are required to address in language of tender sympathy, yet of expostulation and reproach.

III. THE AVERSION OF GOD'S COUNTENANCE IS THE WORST OF ALL CALAMITIES. It is not to be wondered at that men with their composite nature, absorbed as they are in things which affect the body and the earthly life, should think chiefly of the sufferings and privations in which the moral laws of the universe involve them. And these sufferings and privations are realities which no thoughtful man can fail to perceive and to estimate with something like correctness. Yet he who is enlightened and in any measure spiritually sensitive cannot fail to see that it is the regard of God himself which is of chief import. It is better to enjoy the Divine loving-kindness, even in poverty, privation, spoliation, and weakness, than to possess luxury, honour, and the delights of sense, and to know that God's countenance is turned away, is hidden.

IV. A MERCIFUL GOD WILL TURN AGAIN HIS FACE AND CAUSE IT TO SHINE UPON PENITENT AND BELIEVING SUPPLIANTS. It is sin which conceals the Divine countenance; it is repentance which seeks the shining anew of that countenance; and salvation consists in the response of God to the prayer of man. Yet the turning of his face towards us is the work of his own mercy, the revelation of his own nature—compassionate, gracious, and forgiving.—T.

Ver. 25.—*Peace sought in vain.* No feature of distress and horror is omitted in this prophetic description of the effects of God's displeasure manifested towards the Jewish people. The burden of predicting such judgments must have been too heavy to bear: what can be said of the state of those upon whom the judgments came? They might well ask, "Who can abide the day of his coming?" What more appalling than the account given in these few words of the state of the people in the time of their disasters: "They shall seek peace, and there shall be none"?

I. THE GREAT BLESSING OF PEACE. This may be misunderstood. Warfare with ignorance, error, and iniquity, is characteristic of the condition of the good man here upon earth. Our Lord Jesus saw this, and declared, "I am not come to send peace, but a sword." The presence of evil requires that the attitude of the righteous should be one of antagonism. But this is for a season and for a purpose. A state of controversy and hostility is not a state in itself perfectly desirable and good. Peace of conscience, peace with God, peace with Christian brethren, as far as possible peace with all men,—these are blessings devoutly to be desired and sought.

II. THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF SIN WITH PEACE. If peace results from the harmony of the several parts of a man's nature among themselves, and from harmony between man as a moral being and his God, it is not to be expected that, when the passions are arrayed against the reason, interest against conscience, the subject against the rightful and Divine Ruler, there can be peace. It is mercifully ordered that peace should flee when iniquity prevails. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

III. THE PUNISHMENT APPROPRIATE TO SIN OFTEN LEADS TO A DESIRE FOR THE BLESSINGS OF PEACE. Men seek peace, and there is none. Thus they are led to reflect upon the unreasonableness of their expectation that the moral laws of the universe should be changed for their pleasure. Tossed to and fro upon the stormy waters, they long for the haven of repose.

IV. PEACE IS ONLY TO BE OBTAINED UPON GOD'S OWN TERMS OF COMPLETE SURRENDER AND SUBMISSION. It is not to be found either by endeavouring to stifle the voice of conscience within, or by withdrawing from a world of outward strife to some seclusion and isolation. Both these methods have often been tried, but in vain. The conciliation must take place within. The heart must find rest and satisfaction in the gospel of Jesus Christ, "our Peace." The whole nature must, by the power of the Spirit, be brought into subjection to God. The fountain of peace must thus be divinely opened, and "peace will flow as a river."—T.

Ver. 26.—*The prophetic vision dimmed, and the prophetic voice silenced.* In seasons of national calamity and disaster, evils abound which are apparent to every observer. Famine, pestilence, and slaughter, the ruin of industry and the cessation of trade, the breaking-up of homes and the departure of national glory,—such ills as these none can fail to notice and to appreciate. But the worst is not always what meets the eye. Beneath the surface, harm is wrought, and the very springs of the national life may perhaps be poisoned. Ezekiel, in predicting the disasters that shall come upon his countrymen, mentions as among them bonds, death, the destruction of city and temple, the overthrow of king and prince. But he does not fail to refer to what may perhaps strike the imagination less, but what may upon reflection appear to be an evil more lamentable and injurious. The time shall come when, in their distress, the smitten people shall turn for counsel and guidance, comfort and succour, to the priest, the prophet, the ancient, of the Lord. And then, to crown their sorrow, to deepen it into despondency, they shall find that the vision has perished, that "the oracle is dumb."

I. THERE ARE IN A NATION MEN SPECIALLY QUALIFIED AND COMMISSIONED TO BE THE GUIDES OF THE PEOPLE, AND TO INSPIRE THEM TO A LIFE OF VIRTUE AND RELIGION. Among the Jews, the priests performed the sacrifices, and in this represented the nation before God; whilst the seers and prophets spake to the people of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, and in this represented God to the nations. Others, too, there were who lived and taught among their fellow-countrymen as witnesses of God. In every community there are raised up by Divine Providence just and fearless servants of God, who testify to the law which a nation ought to obey, and who summon their fellow-countrymen to obedience. There was doubtless what was special in the case of the religious leaders of the Jews, but the principle is the same wherever there exist soldiers of righteousness whose endeavour it is to lead the people in the holy war.

II. IN THE TIME OF A NATION'S TROUBLE IT IS NATURAL THAT THE PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE RECOURSE TO THEIR RELIGIOUS AND MORAL TEACHERS AND LEADERS. It is with nations as with individuals; in time of prosperity and of that distraction which is produced by absorption in things of earth and sense, the soul's interests are often neglected, and God himself is often forgotten. But let affliction befall either a man or a people, let earthly success come to an end, let earthly props be removed, let earthly visions be shattered,—then it is seen that consolation and succour are sought in directions long forsaken and despised. The counsellor, whose warnings were formerly ridiculed, is now besought to guide and to help. The neglected oracle is sought unto. Unwonted petitions are presented for help. "Is there," is the cry, "is there a word from the Lord?"

III. IN SUCH SEASONS, AND IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, IT MAY BE FOUND THAT APPLICATION FOR COUNSEL AND FOR SUCCOUR IS MADE TOO LATE. The prophet may be dead; he may be slain, the innocent with the guilty; he may share the fate of those whom he warned in vain. Or his voice may be judicially silenced; no word may be given him whereby to relieve anxiety or to encourage hope. And recourse may be had even to the proper quarter when it is too late to be of any service.

IV. YET IT EVER REMAINS TRUE THAT AN APPEAL IS OPEN TO HIM WHO IS THE

SOURCE OF ALL LIGHT AND CONSOLATION. God has not forgotten to be gracious. Certain opportunities which have been neglected may never recur; certain ministers of wisdom and sympathy, whose ministrations have been despised, may no more be available. But the Lord's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, nor his hand shortened that it cannot save.—T.

Vers. 1—15.—*The hand of the clock on the hour of doom.* The bulk of men persist in thinking of God as if he were such a One as themselves. Rejecting the revelation of God's nature contained in Scripture, they conceive of him as a man greatly magnified—the infirmities of man magnified, as well as his virtues. They know the proneness of man to threaten and not to perform; hence they conclude that the judgments of God, because delayed, will evaporate in empty words. God will not be hastened. Proportionate to his immeasurable power is his immeasurable patience. Nevertheless, equitable justice will be meted out. The wrath accumulates as in a thunder-cloud, until it is overburdened, and the storm all the more violently breaks forth. Never yet in the history of men has God failed to vindicate his righteousness. Never yet has the transgressor escaped, and never will he. As surely as the sun shines, vengeance will come.

I. RETRIBUTION, THOUGH APPARENTLY TARDY, HAS ITS OWN SET TIME. For the most part it is not according to human expectation. "God seeth not as man seeth." A thousand things enter into God's calculation which do not enter into man's reckoning. The clock of heaven does not measure days and years; it measures events and necessities. The well-being of other races has to be pondered beside the race of men. Very often the doom of the ungodly is a fixed and irreversible fact long before that doom is felt and endured. From that moment gracious help is withdrawn, and the doomed man becomes the victim of his folly. To God's eye, the *end* is seen long before it is seen by man. While he is yet promising himself much delight, lo! by an invisible thread the sword is suspended over his head.

II. RETRIBUTION IS NOT A HAPHAZARD ACCIDENT. It is the outcome of infallible wisdom and righteous deliberation. The Supreme Ruler of heaven says, "I send." As nothing is too great for his management, so nothing is too minute to engage his notice. He who nourishes myriads of myriads of blades of grass, and clothes the hills with majestic forests, counts every hair of our heads. Too often men are so stunned with the blow of retribution that they count themselves only the victims of a great catastrophe, and look on every side for sympathy. But when conscience awakes, and connects the calamity with previous sin, then at length—too late to avert the crushing evil—they confess that it is "the Lord that smiteth." "God is not mocked." The seed we sow to-day will bear its proper fruit to-morrow.

III. RETRIBUTION FROM GOD IS MOST EQUITABLE. There are no scales so delicately true as those in the hands of God. The judgment is precisely "according to thy ways." It is exact "recompense for *all* thine abominations." Often men are so blinded by the deceitfulness of sin that they do not perceive this. But when the transient pleasure of sin has ceased, men awake to the fact that the retribution is well deserved. This will be the keenest sting of the suffering—that it is a *just desert.* If men could only persuade themselves that they were unjustly treated, it would be an alleviation of the woe—it would be a sweet consolation in their misery. But such alleviation is denied them. Their own consciences will confirm the sentence, and out of the dark abyss the cry will rise, "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints."

IV. RETRIBUTION, IS CLEARLY FORESEEN BY THE RIGHTEOUS. The unbeliever has no eye with which to see the kingdom of God. The organ of vision he has first blinded, then destroyed. So, too, he is blind to the significance of passing events. He does not perceive the moral aspect of things—does not see that God's hand is behind the smoke and din of war. But the man of God has learnt to see God in everything. In all the sunshine of life he sees God, whose presence gives a brighter lustre to all earthly joy. And in all the adversities of life he learns to see the rod and the hand that wields it. Standing by the side of God, and in full sympathy with him, Ezekiel saw clearly every minute detail of the retribution that was preparing, and, until the latest moment, implored them to escape. But he foresaw also that they would delude themselves to the very last—would buoy themselves with false hopes.

V. Retribution, when it comes, is most complete. On every side there is bitter disappointment. The earthly props on which men were wont to rely, fail them. All the bonds of society relax and dissolve. To resist invasion the summoning trumpet is blown; but, alas! none respond. Anarchy is everywhere. The day itself becomes night, and every fount of joy is poisoned. Amid previous corrections and afflictions there were many forms of gracious compensation—silver linings on the black cloud. But no relief comes now. There is defeat and disaster on every side. Weeping endures through a long night, without any prospect of joy in the morning. It is darkness without a beam of light, despair without a vestige of hope. Not even shall there be the sweet relief of tears; for the hearts of men have been rendered insensible by the cursed power of sin. They are at length "past feeling"—incapable of repentance. "Neither shall there be any wailing for them." It is abasement the most profound. The first has become the last.

VI. This retribution is the natural fruitage of sin. Our wise and gracious God has constructed his universe on *this* principle, that every form of rebellion shall bear in itself the seed of penalty. The pivot on which everything turns is righteousness. There is no occasion for God to issue any code of penalties commensurate with acts of transgression. Sin and punishment are one and the selfsame thing. Retribution is simply full-grown sin. It is often sweet in the bud, but the ripened fruit is bitterness absolute. As gunpowder is, in its nature, explosive, so that it is madness to set alight to it and expect it not to explode; so sin is, in its very nature, destructive, and can lead to nothing else than destruction. Love cements and unites; transgression dissolves and separates. And separation from God is ruin. Where God is, there is life; where God is not, there is death. Where God is, there is heaven; where God is not, there is blackest hell.—D.

Vers. 16—22.—*Fallacious deliverance.* Flight is not deliverance. If the invading army is God's army, no escape is possible, save in submission. We cannot elude God's detectives. Lonely mountains, no more than crowded cities, serve as an asylum, if God be our Foe. As we cannot get beyond the limits of his world, neither can we get beyond the reach of his sword.

I. Their misery. They may escape, for a moment, sword-wounds and bodily captivity; yet they have not escaped from inward distress and wretchedness. Exposure to hunger and cold and nakedness on the mountains is scarcely to be preferred to violent death. God, the real Avenger, has smitten them in their flight. Their senseless cowardice has added to their pain. Even though they live, they are dishonoured among men. The heathen nations will point at them with a finger of scorn. The common moralities of men reflect, though it be feebly, the just displeasure of God. Honour is lost, though life is yet continued.

II. Their remorse. Tears are on all faces, and sorrow is an occupant of every breast. Yet it is a selfish sorrow, which bears the fruit of death. It is not repentance, it is only remorse. Had this sorrow earlier come, and had it sprung from a better motive, it would have availed to deliver them. They mourn, not because they have sinned, but because their sin has been found out. When retribution comes, repentance is impossible.

III. The collapse of false trust. In the day of their prosperity they had made their riches their trust. They reposed their faith in idols of silver instead of the living God. For gold they imagined they could hire mercenaries or buy the favour of kings. Such wealth as theirs seemed to them an impregnable security. They could make gates of brass and towers of iron. Yet how sudden and how complete was the collapse of their proud hope! Their gold, instead of a protection, became a snare. It attracted the cupidity of their foes. As hounds scent the prey, so foreign soldiers scented from afar Israel's riches. The gold and silver lavished on Jehovah's temple drew, like a magnet, the avarice of the Babylonian king! To rely on material possessions is to rely on a broken reed—is to slumber on the edge of a volcano.

IV. Their religious degradation. Their temple had been their pride; *now* it shall be their shame. They had gloried in its external beauty, and had forgotten that the Lord of the temple is greater than the building. They had neglected the *spirituality* of worship, and had profaned the holy place with human inventions and with idolatrous symbols. In their folly they had deemed it politic to set up, side by side with Jehovah, the shrines of other deities. But their policy was rotten. It was based on atheistic selfishness. And now the profanation they had commenced shall be completed by their foes. They had admitted a trickling stream of idolatry into the temple; now it shall become a flood. Thus God makes our sins to become our punishments; at length they sting like hornets, they bite like adders. Once our sin tasted like a sweet morsel; when once in the veins it works like poison. Rebellion is but a seed, of which retribution is the ripe fruit.

V. THE CLIMAX OF DISASTER IS GOD'S DEPARTURE. "My face will I turn also from them." This is the crowning disaster, the bitter dregs of misery, the knell of doom. If, in our hour of crushing affliction, God would turn towards us as a Friend, the wheel of ill fortune would be reversed; all loss would be recovered. If he would only move upon our hearts with his mighty grace, and reduce our self-will and pride, disaster would be changed into dowry, night into day. The hurtling clouds would burst into showers of blessing. But when God departs, the last ray of hope departs, and man's prospects set in blackest night.—D.

Vers. 23—27.—*The even balances of Jehovah.* The penal judgments of God are not haphazard events. The minds of thoughtful men discover in them a marked feature of retribution. Striking correspondences occur between the transgression and the punishment. "I will do unto them after their way."

I. VIOLENCE IS MET BY VIOLENCE. The Law of God had been despised; and, instead of a just administration of Law, the rule of violence had prevailed. Therefore by violence they shall be mastered. "Make a chain." The arm of power had dominated over the hand of justice; therefore a mightier arm shall master *it*. Often has it been seen that they who ruthlessly use the sword themselves perish by the sword. Men are often "hoisted on their own petard." The gallows which Haman had prepared for another served for himself.

II. IDOLATRY ASSIMILATES MEN IN LIKENESS TO THE IDOLS. "I will bring the worst of the heathen upon them." The objects of their worship had reputed attributes of lust, cruelty, oppression, violence; these attributes shall appear in the worshippers. It is a law of nature, as well as a law of Scripture, that "they who make them are like unto them; so is every one that bows down to them." As the stream cannot rise above its fount, so man cannot rise above the object of his adoration. Worshippers of idols rapidly deteriorate in character and in moral quality. If God is driven out of the heart, demons will speedily come in. "Nature abhors a vacuum."

III. OPPORTUNITIES ABUSED ARE AT LENGTH CLOSED. "They shall seek peace, and there shall be none." "They shall seek a vision from the prophet; but the Law shall perish from the priest." Had they sought earlier, they would have found; now probation has ceased, the Judge has ascended his throne. All forbearance has its limits. Many men are always one day behind. The tide has ceased to flow. Ebb has begun. In middle life they are weeping over a wasted youth. In old age they are lamenting the decay of vigorous manhood. On a death-bed they regret the neglect of yesterday's opportunity. When the last shilling is spent men learn the value of money. To-day there is the sunlight of hope; to-morrow there will be black despair.

IV. THE LEADERS IN REBELLION INCUR THE HEAVIEST CHASTISEMENTS. "The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation." In proportion to the station any man occupies in society, in proportion to his talents and strength of character, is the influence he exerts, whether for good or for evil. The king will always have a crowd of servile imitators. Princes, by virtue of their exalted rank, wield an extensive influence. For the right employment of influence every man is responsible. He is daily sowing now; and, as the sowing is, so will be the harvest. The mourning of a king will have an intensity of bitterness that never acerbates the tears of a peasant.

V. JUSTICE SHALL FINALLY BE PARAMOUNT. "They shall know that I am the Lord." Although they would not know him as Friend and Benefactor, they shall know him and acknowledge him as the Vindicator of right. The spirits in hell confess him, while blind and ungrateful men ignore him. "*We* know thee who thou art." Righteousness is endowed with a deathless life; and out of all present confusion and strife it shall come to the surface and be by all honoured. The lesson which men will not learn in the days of prosperity they shall learn in the dark hours of adversity. They *shall* know that Jehovah is supreme. *Facile princeps* Yet such knowledge does not save; it leads only to deeper despair. It had been a long fight between self-will and God's will; and men often flatter themselves they are going to conquer. But the termination is always the same: *God over all.*—D.

Vers. 1—4.—*The punishment of the wicked.* "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come," etc. "This chapter," says Dr. Currey, "is a dirge rather than a prophecy. The prophet laments over the near approach of the day wherein the final blow shall be struck, and the city be made the prey of the Chaldean invader. Supposing the date of the prophecy to be the same as that of the preceding, there were now but four, or perhaps three, years to the final overthrow of the kingdom of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar" ('Speaker's Commentary'). Our text leads us to observe—

I. THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED, THOUGH LONG DELAYED, IS CERTAIN, UNLESS IT BE AVERTED BY THEIR REPENTANCE. "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel; An end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now is the end come upon thee." The land is looked upon as a garment, and by the end coming upon the four corners thereof the prophet indicates the fact that the approaching judgment will cover the entire country. The punishment of their sins had been repeatedly and solemnly announced to the Israelites; and they had disregarded the announcement, and persisted in their sinful ways; and now "the end" was at hand. They would not consider that end while there was hope for them; and now the execution of the Divine judgment cast its dark shadow across their path (cf. Lam. i. 9). The delay in the infliction of the punishment of sin is sometimes construed as an assurance that it will never be inflicted. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Perilous and, if persisted in, fatal mistake! If in the time during which punishment is held back the wicked do not truly repent, that punishment will be all the more terrible when it comes (cf. Rom. ii. 4—11). The holiness of God arrays him in resolute antagonism against sin.

II. THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED PROCEEDS FROM THE LORD GOD. "I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways," etc. The Chaldeans were as a weapon in the hand of the Almighty for inflicting deserved punishment upon Israel. (We have noticed this point in our homily on ch. v. 5—17.) When the stroke had fallen it was looked upon as having come from the hand of the Most High (cf. Lam. i. 14, 15; ii. 1—9, 17). All persons and all powers are at God's disposal, and can be employed by him for the execution of his judgments. Very impressively is this illustrated in the plagues and calamities with which he visited Egypt by the hand of Moses.

III. THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED BEARS EXACT RELATIONS TO THEIR SINS. 1. *Their sins are the cause of their punishment.* "I will judge thee according to thy ways." They had brought upon themselves the severe impending judgments. They could not truthfully charge the Lord with injustice or harshness in thus visiting them, for their punishment was the just consequence of their sins. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" With frequent reiteration Ezekiel declares that their sins have evoked their sufferings. With pathetic sorrow Jeremiah acknowledges the same truth (Lam. i. 8, 9, 18; iii. 42; iv. 13, 14). And it is ever true that the sins of men are the reasons of the judgments of God. 2. *Their sins are the measure of their punishment.* "I will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations." Their sins were persistent, and were aggravated by many advantages and privileges conferred upon them; therefore their punishment was terrible in its severity. In the distribution of the Divine judgments a strict proportion is observed between the guilt and the penalty of sin. God inflicts his judgments equitably (cf. Luke xii. 47, 48). 3. *Their sins determine the character of their punishment.* "I will recompense thy ways upon thee, and thine abominations shall be in the midst of thee," *i.e.* in their dire consequences.

According to the order which God has established, the punishment grows out of the sin. Punishment is "ripened sin." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," etc. Sin, says Hengstenberg, "has an active and a passive history. When the latter begins, that which was before the object of gratification becomes the object of terror." "Let the sinner know that he binds for himself the rod which will smite him." "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins."

IV. THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED WILL BE INFLEXIBLY EXECUTED. "And mine eye shall not spare thee, neither will I have pity." The holy Scriptures magnify the mercy of God—its infinity, its perpetuity, its tenderness, and his delight in it. And sometimes the wicked have drawn from these representations the unwarrantable conclusion that he is so merciful as to be devoid of justice, so gentle as to be incapable of anger. But "our God is a consuming Fire." He will be as firm in the punishment of the persistently wicked as he is gracious in pardoning the penitent. He who mercifully spared repentant Nineveh ruthlessly destroyed incorrigible Sodom and Gomorrah.

V. THAT THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED WITNESSES TO THE DIVINE EXISTENCE AND SUPREMACY. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord." (We have dealt with these words as they occur in ch. vi. 7, 10.) "Every one must know the Lord in the end, if not as One that calls, allures, blesses, then as One that smites, is angry, punishes" (Schröder). Be it ours to know him as the God of all grace, and to obey and serve him with loyal hearts and devoted lives.—W. J.

Vers. 5—11.—*Aspects of the execution of the Divine judgments.* "Thus saith the Lord God; An evil, an only evil, behold, is come. An end is come," etc. Nearly everything contained in these verses we have already noticed in previous paragraphs. Vers. 8 and 9 are almost a literal repetition of vers. 3 and 4, which came under consideration in our preceding homily. But certain aspects of the execution of the Divine judgment are here set forth which we have not hitherto contemplated. We shall confine our attention to a brief consideration of these.

I. THE DELIBERATION WITH WHICH THE EXECUTION OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS IS PREPARED. "The rod hath blossomed, pride hath budded. Violence is risen up into a rod of wickedness." The rod is the emblem of power to execute the judgment; and pride, of disposition to execute it. Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean monarch is thus indicated. And the text suggests that his power had long been in preparation for the stern work which he was about to do, and that now it was in readiness for it, like a rod which has been planted, taken root, and grown into vigorous development. "It illustrates," says Kitto, "the Lord's deliberateness in executing his judgments, as contrasted with man's haste, impatience, and precipitancy. Man, so liable to err in judgment and action and to whom, slow deliberation in inflicting punishment upon transgressors might seem naturally to result from his own consciousness of weakness, is in haste to judge and prompt to act; whereas he who cannot err, and whose immediate action must be as true and right as his most delayed procedure, works not after the common manner of men, but after the manner of a husbandman in sowing and planting. When the sin comes to that state, which must in the end render judgment needful for the maintenance of righteousness upon the earth, and for the vindication of the Lord's justice and honour, the rod of punishment is planted; it grows as the sin grows; and it attains its maturity for action at the exact time that the iniquity reaches maturity for punishment. When Israel entered upon that course of sin which ended in ruin, the rod of the Babylonian power was planted; and as the iniquities of Israel increased, the rod went on growing, until, under Nebuchadnezzar, it became a great tree, overshadowing the nations; and when the full term was come, it was ripe and ready for the infliction upon Israel of the judgments which had so often been denounced, and were so greatly needed" ('Daily Bible Illustrations'). This principle of the Divine action in human history may be traced in the relation of the Israelites to the ancient Canaanites. And in the Babylonian power it receives twofold illustration. One of these we have in the text, where Babylon is the rod of judgment for Israel. And afterwards Babylon itself was smitten by the rod of the Medo-Persian power, which had been gradually growing into maturity and strength. And the same principle is in operation to-day in relation both to nations and to individuals. If by either sin be persisted in, the rod of God's judgment for that sin will be planted, and when it has grown into power, God will sorely smite the nation or the individual with it. What the poet says of nature we may say of God.

> "Nature has her laws
> That will not brook infringement; in all time,
> All circumstance, all state, in every clime,
> She holds aloft the same avenging sword,
> And, sitting on her boundless throne sublime,
> The vials of her wrath, with justice stored,
> Shall, in her own good hour, on all that's ill be poured."
> (J. G. Percival.)

II. THE SUDDENNESS WITH WHICH THE EXECUTION OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS TAKES PLACE. "An end is come, the end is come: it watcheth for thee; behold, it is come." Instead of "it watcheth for thee," the Hebrew is, as in the margin, "it awaketh against thee." The end which had long seemed to sleep, now awakes and comes; it comes in sharp judgments. "The repetition indicates the certainty, the greatness, and the swiftness" of the approaching end. The judgment which had so long and frequently been announced to Israel, would come upon them at last suddenly and unexpectedly. That which seemed to sleep, awakes, arises, and draws near, to their confusion and dismay. How often do the judgments of God come unexpectedly, and with a great shock of surprise! Thus came the Deluge upon the old world, and the fiery flood upon the cities of the plain (Matt. xxiv. 38, 39; Luke xvii. 26—29). Thus came the awful summons to the fool in the midst of his temporal prosperity and spiritual destitution (Luke xii. 16—20). And so will come the last, the great day of judgment. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," etc. (2 Pet. iii. 10). Although the wicked may persuade themselves that the Divine retribution lingers and slumbers, it is ever awake and active, and, unless they repent, it shall come upon them in "swift destruction."

III. THE TRANSFORMATION WHICH THE EXECUTION OF THE DIVINE JUDGMENTS PRODUCES. "The time is come, the day of trouble is near, and not the sounding again of the mountains." Schröder translates more correctly, "The day is near, tumult, and not joyous shouting upon the mountains." Upon some of their hills the Israelites planted vines, and in the time of the gathering of the vintage the labourers made the hills to echo with shouts and songs of gladness (cf. Isa. xvi. 10). Perhaps the prophet refers to this in the text. Or the reference may be to the altars which were upon the mountains (ch. vi. 3, 13; Jer. iii. 21, 23), and from which the shouts and songs of revelling worshippers echoed far and wide. And instead of these shouts of joy there should arise the wild tumult of war, and the lamentable cries of the distressed, imploring succour or seeking deliverance. Terrible are the transformations wrought by the judgments of the Most High. The selfish rich man passed from his luxurious home, his purple and fine linen, and his sumptuous fare, "and in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments," and was unable to obtain even a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. Blessed are they who, through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are delivered from condemnation, and made heirs of eternal life.—W. J.

Vers. 12, 13, 19.—*The limitation of the power of riches.* "The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn," etc. It is not wise to despise riches, or to affect to do so, or to depreciate them. They have many uses; they may be made the means of promoting the physical well-being and the mental progress of their possessor, of enabling him to do much good to others, and of furthering the highest and best interests of the human race. When wisely employed, they produce most excellent results. On the other hand, it is foolish and wrong to over-estimate them, to make their attainment the object of our supreme concern and effort, to trust in them, to make a god of them. The verses chosen as our text suggest the following observations.

I. THAT CIRCUMSTANCES MAY ARISE REDUCING THE VALUE OF RICHES UNTIL THEY ARE ALMOST WORTHLESS. "Let not the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, although they were yet alive: for the vision is touching the whole multitude thereof;

he shall not return." The reference seems to be to a compulsory sale of their estates by the Jews at the time of the troubles now impending. As the 'Speaker's Commentary' points out, "it was grievous for an Israelite to part with his land. But now the seller need not mourn his loss, nor the buyer exult in his gain. A common ruin should carry both away; the buyer should not take possession, nor should the seller return to profit by the buyer's absence. Should he live, it will be in exile. All should live the pitiful lives of strangers in another country." The sad changes about to transpire would so depreciate the value of the commodity sold, that the seller need not mourn over a bad bargain, or the buyer rejoice over a good one. Circumstances and events producing similar effects frequently arise, and will readily occur to every one upon reflection. The commercial value of properties and possessions fluctuates; and that to which a man may be looking confidently for the means of subsistence may become almost or altogether worthless. There is no absolute and permanent value in the riches of this world.

II. THAT THERE ARE EVILS IN LIFE FROM WHICH RICHES ARE UTTERLY POWERLESS TO DELIVER THEIR POSSESSORS. (Ver. 19.) Notice: 1. *Their inability to satisfy their souls.* "They shall not satisfy their souls." Schröder interprets this that their silver and gold were æsthetically worthless to the Israelites in the day of their calamity; they were not able to minister to their taste or promote their enjoyment in their season of bitter woe. It is true that in the day of sore distress all that can be bought with money will not afford relief. Æsthetic gratifications—pictures and statues, poetry and music—cannot adequately minister to the soul in its deepest sorrows. But may we not discover in the words a deeper meaning? Gold and silver cannot supply the soul's greatest needs, or satisfy its most importunate cravings. The gifts of God cannot be purchased with money. 2. *Their inability, in certain circumstances, to procure even the necessaries of bodily life.* "They shall . . . neither fill their bowels." When no food was left in the beleaguered city, the Israelites could not appease, or even mitigate, their hunger with their riches. I have read of an Arab who lost his way in the desert, and was in danger of dying from hunger. At last he found one of the cisterns out of which the camels drink, and a little leathern bag near it. "God be thanked!" he exclaimed. "Here are some dates or nuts; let me refresh myself." He opened the bag, but only to turn away in sad disappointment. The bag contained pearls. And of what value were they to one who, like Esau, was "at the point to die"? 3. *Their inability to deliver from the retributions of the Divine government.* "Their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord" (cf. Zeph. i. 18). Riches can neither set a man so high that God's judgments cannot reach him, nor surround him with such panoply that God's arrows cannot pierce through it. We have striking illustrations of this in the cases of two rich men of whom our Lord spake (Luke xii. 16—20; xvi. 19—31). And there are some of the ordinary afflictions and sorrows of this life from which we can secure neither immunity nor deliverance by means of riches. "A golden crown cannot cure the headache, nor a velvet slipper give ease of the gout, nor a purple robe fray away a burning fever." All the royal wealth of King David could not ward off death from one of his children (2 Sam. xii. 15—18), or exempt him from the heart-breaking treachery and rebellion of another (2 Sam. xv.).

III. THAT CERTAIN EVILS OF LIFE ARE AGGRAVATED BY THE POSSESSION OF RICHES. In circumstances like those indicated by the prophet riches are calculated to increase the evils in two ways. 1. *They may endanger life by enkindling the cupidity of enemies.* Greedy of booty, the invaders of Jerusalem would be likely to direct their unwelcome attentions to the rich, and not to the poor. As Matthew Henry quaintly observes, "It would be a temptation to the enemy to cut their throats for their money." Hence Ezekiel says, "They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed," or "shall be as filth." They would cast it away as an unclean thing, because their life was imperilled by it. 2. *They may endanger life by hindering flight from enemies.* Riches would be an encumbrance to those Israelites who sought to escape from the Chaldean soldiery by flight, and would retard their progress. Therefore, to be more free and swift in their movements, "they shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as filth." How many human lives have been lost in the attempt to save riches! When the steamer *Washington* was burnt, one of the passengers, on the first alarm of fire, ran to his trunk, and took from it a large amount of gold and silver coin, and, loading his pockets, ran to the deck and jumped overboard. As a necessary consequence, he went down immediately. His riches were his ruin.

IV. THAT RICHES MAY BE THE OCCASION OF SIN. "Because it is the stumbling-block of their iniquity." Their silver and gold had been the occasion of sin to the Israelites, especially in the manufacture of idols. "Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols" (Hos. viii. 4). And there are many in our age and country to whom riches are an occasion of sin; they set their affections upon them, they repose their confidence in them. "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" etc. (Luke xviii. 24, 25). "The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word" of the kingdom. "They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare," etc. (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10, 17—19).

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let us endeavour to form a true estimate of riches.* 2. *If we possess them, let us use our riches, not as the proprietors, but as the stewards thereof, who will one day be called by the great Owner to render the account of our stewardship.*—W. J.

Ver. 13 (last clause).—*The impossibility of becoming truly strong in a life of sin.* "Neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life." This clause has been variously rendered and interpreted. Fairbairn translates, "No one by his iniquity shall invigorate his life." Schröder, "Nor shall they—in his iniquity is every one's life—show themselves strong." And the 'Speaker's Commentary, "And, every man living in his iniquity, they shall gather no strength." The meaning seems to be—Let no one think that in these impending judgments he can invigorate himself in "his iniquity; from such a source no such strengthening or invigoration of life can be derived; on the contrary, it is this very iniquity which is bringing all to desolation and ruin." Two observations are authorized by the text.

I. THAT WICKED MEN SOMETIMES ENDEAVOUR TO STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES IN THEIR INIQUITY. This is frequently and variously done. Take a few common examples of it. The dishonest bank-manager or book-keeper attempts to hide his defalcations by manipulating the accounts, making false entries in them, etc. Many try to conceal vice or crime by falsehood, as did Gehazi the servant of Elisha (2 Kings v. 20—27). A man who has got into monetary difficulties through betting or gambling seeks to escape from them by theft or forgery. Or a man has been in a position of privilege or power, and by reason of his own misdoing he is losing that position, but he seeks to retain it by further wrong-doing. When Saul, the King of Israel, realized that the kingdom would not descend to his heirs, and saw his own popularity waning and David's growing, he endeavoured to secure the kingdom to his family by repeated attempts to kill David. Or when a person has obtained riches or power by fraud, oppression, or cruelty, and finding that possession failing him, he seeks to retain it firmly by perpetrating other crimes. The Macbeth of Shakespeare is a striking illustration of this. When he feels himself insecure on the throne which he had committed murder to obtain, he says to Lady Macbeth, the daring partner of his dread guilt—

> "Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ill."

And later, when he had incurred the guilt of another murder, and was tormented by terrible fears, he says to her—

> "For mine own good,
> All causes shall give way; I am in blood
> Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

And thus he endeavoured to strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life.

II. THESE EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THEMSELVES IN THEIR INIQUITY MUST INEVITABLY END IN FAILURE. Let us try to show this. We have seen that men try to strengthen themselves in iniquity by means of falsehood. But falsehood is opposed to the reality of things, and by its very nature cannot give lasting strength or security to any one. Carlyle says forcibly, "No lie you can speak or act, but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a bill drawn on nature's reality, and be presented then for payment, with the answer—*No effects.*" Again, "For if there be a Faith from of old, it is this, as we often repeat, that no Lie can live for ever. . . . All Lies have sentence of death written down against them in Heaven's chancery itself; and, slowly or fast, advance incessantly towards their hour." "The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment." "He that speaketh lies shall perish." And turning from falsehood in particular to sin in general, iniquity, so far from invigorating man, by its essential nature strips him of strength and courage. Thus the guilty and aforetime brave Macbeth cries—

"How is't with me when every noise appals me?"

And elsewhere, Shakespeare says truly—

"Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind;
The thief doth fear each bush an officer."

To the same effect writes Wordsworth—

"From the body of one guilty deed
A thousand ghostly fears and haunting thoughts proceed."

And our prophet, "How weak is thine heart, saith the Lord God, seeing thou doest all these things!" (ch. xvi. 30). "The wicked flee when no man pursueth; but the righteous are bold as a lion." The consciousness of truth and uprightness inspires the heart with courage and nerves the arm with power.

"What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just;
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."
(Shakespeare.)

And the throne which is based on injustice, cruelty, or blood, and maintained by oppression and tyranny, is founded upon sand and supported by feebleness. Wickedness is weakness. "It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness; for the throne is established by righteousness." "The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever." No man can ever truly strengthen himself in iniquity; neither can any number of men do so. The only way by which the wicked may become truly strong is by resolutely turning from sin and trusting in the Saviour. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," etc. (Isa. lv. 7).—W. J.

Vers. 20—22.—*The perversion of desirable possessions punished by the deprivation of them.* "As for the beauty of his ornament, he set it in majesty," etc. In these words we discover—

I. DESIRABLE POSSESSIONS SINFULLY PERVERTED. (Ver. 22.) This verse has been differently translated and interpreted. Hengstenberg renders it, "And his glorious ornament he has set for pride; and they made the images of their abominations and detestable idols of it: therefore have I laid it on them for uncleanness." Some refer this to the temple, which "by way of eminence was the glory and ornament of the nation." Others, connecting it with the preceding verse, refer it to the riches, or to the elegant ornaments made of gold and silver, which the Israelites possessed. Without presuming to speak dogmatically on the point, we incline to the latter view. The Israelites were an opulent people. The Prophet Isaiah said, "Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures." God had enabled them to accumulate riches (cf. Deut. viii. 18). And now they misused their wealth against him. 1. *Their desirable possessions they turned into an occasion of pride.* "His glorious ornament he has set for pride." The "he" signifies the people, who are called either *he* or *they*. They perverted their riches into a parade of their own self-sufficient power; they misused them for their self-glorification. The prosperity, which should have enkindled their gratitude to the Lord their God, led to their presumption and self-exaltation (cf. Isa. ii. 11, 17). This is not a solitary case, but a representative one, of the way in which the gifts of God are perverted by the sin of man. When spiritual privileges lead to supercilious pharisaism (cf. Luke xviii. 11); when the possession of personal gifts and abilities generate self-conceit; or when the possession of riches is made the occasion of self-laudation (cf. Deut. vii. 17; Dan. iv. 30);—when these things occur, we have a similar abuse of the gifts of God. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," etc. (Jer. ix. 23, 24). 2. *Their desirable possessions they turned into detestable idols.* "They made the images of their abominations and detestable idols of it." In Isa. ii. 7, 8 the abundance of riches and the prevalence of idolatry stand in close connection. To a great extent the idolatry proceeded from the self-exaltation. Pride would choose even its own god, rather than accept and serve the true God as he has revealed himself and his will. "All idolatry," says Hengstenberg, "is at bottom egoism, the apotheosis of self, that sets up its god out of itself—first makes and then adores." The gold and silver, which the Lord had enabled them to acquire, they abused against his express commands, and to his dishonour. Nor is this sin of perverting God's gifts to sinful and base uses without its modern illustrations. When the poet employs his glorious gift of song for the pollution of the imagination; or the philosopher his powers for the propagation of scepticism and the destruction of faith; when riches are expended for the gratification of pride, the love of vain show, or for any sinful object; when a nation uses its power oppressively, tyrannically, or to the injury of others;—when these things are done, the principle of the sin dealt with in our text receives fresh illustration.

II. PERVERTED POSSESSIONS TAKEN FROM THEIR PERVERTORS AND GIVEN TO THEIR ENEMIES. "And I will give it into the hands of the strangers for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall pollute it." Notice: 1. *The true Proprietor of man's possessions.* "I will give it into the hands of the strangers." In these words, by implication, the Most High asserts his claim to dispose of the riches of the Israelites according to his own pleasure. The richest man is but the steward or trustee of the riches. God alone is absolute Proprietor. The ablest man is indebted to God for his abilities, and is solemnly accountable to him for the use of them. "For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" etc. (1 Cor. iv. 7). God has the right to do with our gifts and goods how and what he will. 2. *Man deprived of the possessions which he has abused by the true Proprietor of them.* God was about to give the riches of the Israelites to the Chaldeans, who are here spoken of as "strangers, and the wicked of the earth." They could not have conquered and spoiled the Israelites but for the permission of the Lord Jehovah. The victory of the Chaldeans was his penal victory over his sinful people. Is it not reasonable and righteous that the gifts which have been perverted should be withdrawn from their pervertors? that the possessions which have been abused should be taken away from their abusers? (cf. Matt. xxi. 33—43).

III. THE PERVERSION OF DESIRABLE POSSESSIONS LEADING TO THE AVERSION OF THE DIVINE FAVOUR. "My face will I turn also from them, and they shall pollute my secret: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it." 1. *Persistence in sin leads to the withdrawal of the favour of God.* Turning the Divine face to any one is an expression denoting the favourable regards of God (cf. Numb. vi. 25, 26; Ps. xxv. 16; lxvii. 1; lxix. 16; lxxx. 3, 7, 19; lxxxvi. 16). "The face of God," says Schröder suggestively, "is the consecration of our life: our free upward look to it, its gracious look on us." In his favour there is life and peace, prosperity and joy. The turning of his face from any one is a token of his displeasure. He was about to turn it away thus from Israel. 2. *The withdrawal of the favour of God leaves man without adequate defence.* "They shall pollute my secret: for the robbers shall enter into it, and defile it." Very different meanings are given to the words, "my secret." Some would translate it, "my treasure," and apply it to Jerusalem; others to the holy land in general. Ewald interprets it, "the treasure of my guardianship, *i.e.* of my country or my people." It seems to us probable that Jerusalem is meant. When God turns "away his face from any, the face of calamity and destruction is towards them, nay, destruction is upon them. No sooner doth God turn away from a nation, but destruction steps into that nation." He is both the Sun and the Shield of his people; and if he turn his face away from them, they are in darkness, and defenceless before their enemies and dangers. And this was the punishment of idolatry most solemnly announced by Jehovah through his servant Moses: "I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Deut. xxxi. 16—18).

CONCLUSION. Here are solemn admonitions as to our use of the privileges and possessions, the gifts and goods, which God has bestowed upon us.—W. J.

Vers. 23—27.—*The dread development of moral evil.* "Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes," etc. This paragraph suggests the following observations.

I. THAT PERSISTENCE IN SIN LEADS TO PLENITUDE OF SIN. "Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence." The wickedness of the people had grown to such an extent that the darkest crimes were everywhere prevalent and predominant. The city was filled with outrage, and the country with blood-guiltness. Sin, unless it be striven against and resisted, increases both in measure and in power, until it attains unto terrible fulness and maturity. As in holiness, so also in wickedness, full development is reached gradually. Peoples and nations arrive at thorough moral corruption not with a bound, but step by step. But unless checked, wickedness ever tends to that dreadful goal (cf. Gen. xv. 16; Dan. viii. 23; Matt. xxiii. 32; 1 Thess. ii. 16).

II. THAT PLENITUDE OF SIN USHERS IN THE AWFUL JUDGMENTS OF GOD. Because of the fulness of wickedness, the calamities announced by the prophet were coming upon the people. This is explicitly stated in both the twenty-third and twenty-fourth verses. The prevalent iniquities of Israel were the meritorious cause of the stern judgments of the Lord. Several features of these require notice. 1. *They were of dread severity.* They were to be carried into captivity. To set forth this truth Ezekiel is summoned to "make a chain." And, as a matter of fact, Zedekiah the king was bound with fetters of brass, and carried to Babylon (2 Kings xxv. 7). And a post-exilian poet speaks of the miserable captivity of the people (Ps. cvii. 10—12). Their homes were to be seized and held by their enemies. "I will bring the worst of the heathen, and they shall possess their houses." Their sanctuary was to be profaned. "Their holy places shall be defiled." The reference is to the temple, their "holy and beautiful house." The prophet speaks of it as *theirs*, not *God's*, probably to indicate that God had already forsaken the sanctuary which they had defiled. "Woe be to us when our sanctuaries are nothing but *our* sanctuaries!" Anguish was to take hold upon them. "Destruction cometh;" literally, "standing up of the hair cometh" (Professor Cheyne). If we accept this view of the word, it denotes extreme anguish or horror by one of the physical manifestations thereof, as in 'Hamlet' (act i. sc. 5)—

> "I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word
> Would harrow up thy soul; freeze thy young blood;
> Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres;
> Thy knotted and combinèd locks to part,
> And each particular hair to stand on end,
> Like quills upon the fretful porpentine."
>
> (Shakespeare.)

2. *They were to come in terrible succession.* "Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour." "Mischief" fails to fully express the force of the original word. Fairbairn renders it "woe;" Cheyne, "ruin;" Schröder, "destruction." Woe upon woe, misery upon misery, would befall them. Calamities would rush upon them in troops. As the king of Egypt was visited with plague after plague, so the strokes of the Divine judgments are sometimes sternly repeated, each stroke for a time being the harbinger of others. 3. *Even the mightiest would be unable to stand against them.* "I will also make the pomp of the strong to cease." Jehovah by his servant Moses had threatened the Israelites with a dreadful series of punishments if they persisted in rebelling against him, including this, "I will break the pride of your power" (Lev. xxvi. 19). When the Omnipotent arises for judgment, the most powerful creature is impotent to withstand him. "Hast thou an arm like God?"

III. THAT IN TIMES OF SORE DISTRESS THE WICKED SEEK HELP OF THE LORD OR OF HIS SERVANTS. "They shall seek peace, and there shall be none; . . . they shall seek a vision of the prophet." "Peace" is not an adequate rendering of the Hebrew here. Professor Cheyne translates, "safety;" and Schröder, "salvation." In their overwhelming calamities the Israelites would seek the help which they had despised in the time of their prosperity. So the proud Pharaoh, when the plagues were upon him and his subjects, repeatedly called for Moses and Aaron, and besought them to entreat the Lord on his behalf. So also the perverse and rebellious Israelites applied unto Moses when they were smarting under the Divine chastisements (Numb. xi. 2; xxi. 7; cf. Ps. lxxviii. 34—37). And the presumptuous Jeroboam, soon as his hand was smitten with paralysis, entreated the prayers of the prophet whom a moment before he was about to treat with violence (1 Kings xiii. 6). By thus seeking deliverance from God in the time of their distress, the wicked bear witness to their sense of the reality of his Being, and of their need of him. And by seeking the intercession of his faithful servants they unwittingly testify to the worth of genuine religion.

IV. THAT MEN WHO HAVE REJECTED GOD IN SEASONS OF PEACE MAY SEEK HELP FROM HIM IN SEASONS OF DISTRESS, YET NOT OBTAIN IT. "They shall seek peace, and there shall be none; . . . then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the Law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients. The king shall mourn," etc. The following points require brief notice. 1. *Deliverance from trouble, and direction in trouble, sought in vain.* The Israelites seek for safety, but find it not; for prophetic guidance, but it fails them. The prophet or seer has no vision for them; the priest has no instruction in the Law or in religion; the ancients or wise men have no counsel for their life and conduct. Saul, the King of Israel, presents a mournful illustration of this (1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 15). "Because I have called, and ye refused," etc. (Prov. i. 24—31). 2. *Failure to obtain help in trouble producing great distress.* "The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation," etc. The distress is general. The king, the prince, and the people all feel it. The calamities are not partial or sectional, but national. The distress is very great. The king mourns in deep inward grief; the prince clothes himself with horror, is as it were wrapt up in terror; and the hands of the common people tremble. 3. *The righteousness of these judgments.* "I will do unto them after their way, and according to their deserts will I judge them." The dealings of the Lord with them would be regulated by their conduct. His judgments would correspond with their lives and works. They would reap the fruit of their doings. 4. *The righteous judgments of God leading to the recognition of him.* "And they shall know that I am the Lord." In this day of their calamity they will feel and acknowledge the supremacy of Jehovah. (See our remarks on ver. 4, and on ch. vi. 7, 10.) Let us seek to know him, not in his judgments, but in his mercies; not in wrath, but in love. "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ver. 1.—And it came to pass, etc. We begin with a fresh date. One year and one month had passed since the vision of Chebar, and had been occupied partly by the acted, partly by the spoken, prophecies of the preceding chapters. In the mean time, things had gone from bad to worse in Jerusalem. In the absence of the higher priests, idolatry was more rampant, and had found its way even into the temple. It is probable that tidings of this had reached Ezekiel, as we know that frequent communications passed between the exiles and those they had left behind (Jer. xxix. 1—3, 9, 25). Directly or indirectly, Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, may have conveyed a message, orally or written, from Jeremiah himself. Some such report may have led to the visit from the elders of Judah, if we understand by that term the exiles of Tel-Abib. I venture, however, on the conjecture that possibly those who came to the prophet were actually visitors who had come from Judah. Elsewhere, as in ch. xiv. 1 and xx. 1, those who thus came are described as "elders of Israel," or the captives (ch. i. 1), "they of the Captivity" (ch. iii. 15). In either case, the visions that follow gain a special significance. The prophet becomes the seer. It is given to him to know, in a manner which finds a spurious analogue in the alleged mental travelling of the clairvoyant of modern psychology, what is passing in the city from which the messengers had come—and to show that he knows it. With such facts before his eyes, what other answer can there be than that evil must meet its doom? And so we pass into the second series of prophecies which ends with ch. xiii. 23. It would seem as if the enquirers had kept silent as well as the prophet. We are not told that they asked anything. His look and manner, perhaps also attitude and gesture, forbade utterance. The hand of the Lord—the trance-state—was in the act to fall on him (see notes on ch. iii. 14, 22). When the trance-state was over, we may think of him as reporting and recording what he had thus seen in vision.

Ver. 2.—**I beheld, and lo a likeness, etc.** The vision opens with a theophany like that of ch. i.; but here, as there, Ezekiel uses the word which emphasizes the fact that what he had seen was but a "likeness" of the ineffable glory, an image of the Unseen. (For "amber," see ch. i. 4, 27.) In this case we note the absence of the cherubic figures. It is simply the "appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah," seen now in the glow of fire, without the milder, more hopeful brightness of the rainbow (ch. i. 28).

Ver. 3.—**The form of an hand** (comp. ch. ii. 9; Dan. v. 5). For the mode of transit, see Bel and the Dragon, ver. 36, as probably a direct imitation. The touch of the "hand" was followed by the action of the Spirit, **in visions** which he knew to be more than dreams, visions that came from God (comp. ch. i. 1; xl. 2). The word is not the same as that commonly used by Daniel (*chazon*), and often by Ezekiel himself (ch. vii. 13; xii. 22, 23, *et al.*), but *mareh*, which implies a more direct act of intuition. The word appears again in ch. xi. 24; xliii. 3, and in Dan. viii. 26, 27, *et al.* **To the door of the gate, etc.** From the first we trace the priest's familiarity with the structure of the temple. He is brought, as it were, after his journey in the spirit, **to the door of the gate of the inner court that looketh towards the north** (Revised Version). This is identified in ver. 5 with the "gate of the altar." It may probably also be identified with the "upper gate" of ch. ix. 2; the "high gate" of Jer. xx. 2; the "higher gate" of 2 Kings xv. 35, built by Jotham; the "new gate" of Jer. xxxvi. 10. Obviously it was one of the most conspicuous portions of the temple, where the people gathered in large numbers. And here the prophet sees what he calls **the image of jealousy.** The words that follow probably give his explanation of the strange phrase, not found elsewhere, though it might naturally be suggested by Deut. xxxii. 16, 21; Ps. lxxviii. 58. What this image was we can only conjecture. The word for "image" is a rare one, and is found only here and in Deut. iv. 16; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 7, 15. It may have been the Asherah (the "grove" of the Authorized Version), or conical stone, such as Manasseh had made and placed, with an altar dedicated to it, in the house of the Lord (2 Kings xxi. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiii. 3), or one of Baal, or of Ashtaroth, or even of Tammuz (see ver. 14). As the word "grove" does not occur in Ezekiel, it may be sufficient to state that the *Ashera* was a pillar symbolical either of a goddess of the same name, or, as some think, of the Phœnician Astarte. The worship seems to have first become popular under Jezebel (1 Kings xviii. 19), and took deep root both in Israel and Judah. The cultus, as in 2 Kings xxiii. 7, seems to have been connected with the foulest licence, like that of the Babylonian Mylitta (Herod., i. 199; Baruch vi. 43). The work of Josiah had clearly had but a temporary success, and the people had gone back to the confluent polytheism of the reign of Manasseh. In such a state of things the worst was possible. For recent discussions on the *Ashera*, see Kuenen, 'Relig. Isr.' (Eng. transl.), i. 88; Schrader; Robertson Smith, 'Relig. of Semites,' p. 172; and T. K. Cheyne, in the *Academy* of December 14, 1889.

Vers. 4, 5.—**And, behold, etc.** In appalling contrast with that "image of jealousy," Ezekiel saw what he had not seen, as he first became conscious that he was in the court of the temple—the vision of the Divine glory, such as he had seen it on the banks of Chebar (ch. i. 4—28). He was to look first on this picture and then on that, and the guilt of Judah was measured by that contrast.

Ver. 6.—**That I should go far off, etc.** The lesson taught was that already implied in the fact that the glorious vision had come to him from the north (ch. i. 4). The temple was already as a God-deserted shrine. His return to it now was but the coming of the Judge and the Destroyer. We are reminded of the Μεταβαίνωμεν ἔντευθεν ("Let us depart hence"), which was heard in the darkness of the night before the later destruction of Jerusalem (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud.,' vi. 5. 3). Bad begins, but worse remains behind. The prophet is led onward as through the successive stages of an *inferno* of idolatries.

Ver. 7.—**To the door of the court.** What follows suggests that the prophet was led to the gate that opened from the inner to the outer court. This was surrounded by chambers or cells (Jer. xxxv. 4). The term for "wall" (*kir*) is that specially used for the wall which encloses a whole group of buildings (Numb. xxxv. 4). **Behold a hole in the wall.** The fact was clearly significant. The worship here was more clandestine than that of the "image of jealousy." We are not warranted, perhaps, in insisting on minute consistency in the world of visions, but the question naturally arises—How did the worshippers enter the chamber if Ezekiel had to enlarge the hole in the wall in order to get in? We may surmise that the entrance from the temple court had been blocked up all but entirely in the days of Josiah, that the idolaters now entered it from without or through some other chamber, while Ezekiel thinks of himself as coming upon them like a spy in the dim distance of the covered passage through which he made his way.

Ver. 10.—**Every form of creeping things.** The words obviously paint the theriomorphic worship of Egypt, the scarabæus probably being prominent. The alliance between Jehoiakim and Pharaoh (2 Kings xxiv. 33—35), and which Zedekiah was endeavouring to renew, would naturally bring about a revival of that cultus. Small chambers in rock or tomb filled with such pictured symbols were specially characteristic of it (Gosse, 'Monuments of Egypt,' p. 6; 'Ammian. Marcellin.,' xxii. 15).

Ver. 11.—**Seventy men, etc.** The number was probably chosen with reference to the "elders" who had seen the Divine glory in Exod. xxiv. 9, 10. The Sanhedrin, or council of seventy, did not exist till after the Captivity. The number can scarcely have been accidental, and may imply that the elders were formally representative. Another Jaazaniah, the son of Jeremiah, appears in Jer. xxxv. 3; yet another, the son of Azur, in ch. xi. 1. If the Shaphan mentioned is the scribe, the son of Azaliah, under Josiah (2 Kings xxii. 3), the father of Ahikam (2 Kings xxii. 12), of Elasah (Jer. xxix. 3), and of Gemariah (Jer. xxxvi. 10, 11, 12), and the grandfather of Gedaliah (Jer. xxxix. 14, *et al.*), all of whom were prominent in the reform movement under Josiah, or as friends of Jeremiah, and no other Shaphan appears in history, the fact that one of his sons is the leader of the idolatrous company must have had for Ezekiel a specially painful significance. He could scarcely have forgotten the meaning of his name, "The Lord is listening," and probably refers to it in ver. 12. As the climax of this chamber of horrors, the seventy elders were all acting as priests, and were offering to their pictured idols the incense which none but the sons of Aaron had a right to use, and which they offered to Jehovah only.

Ver. 12.—**Every man, etc.** And this, after all, was but a sample of the prevalence of the Egyptian influence. Other elders had, in the dark, a like *adytum*, a like chamber of imagery, like the Latin *lararium*, filled with a like cloud of incense. And though the name of the leader of the band might have warned them that the Lord was listening, they boasted, in their blindness, that Jehovah did not see them; he had forsaken the temple, and had gone elsewhere. They thought of Jehovah as of a local deity who had abdicated. They were free to do as they liked without fear. The words are worth noting further as the first of a series of popular half-proverbs, in which the thoughts of the people clothed themselves (see ch. xi. 3; xii. 22; xviii. 2, 19; xxxiii. 10; xxxvii. 11). All these imply some personal knowledge of what was passing in Jerusalem.

Ver. 14.—**Behold, there sat women wailing for Tammuz.** The point of view is probably the same as that of ver. 3, but the women were apparently in the outer porch of it, as he has to be brought to the gate in order to see them. We are led to note two things: (1) the general prominence of women in the later idolatry of Judah; (2) the specific character of the Tammuz-worship. Under (1) we have the women who wove hangings for the Ashera (2 Kings xxiii. 7), those who had burnt incense to other gods, especially to the queen of heaven (Jer. xliv. 9, 15—19), probably, *i.e.*, to Ashtaroth. (2) The name *Tammuz* does not meet us elsewhere in the Old Testament. All interpreters, however, agree that it answers to the Adonis of Greek mythology. So Jerome translates it, and expressly states (*in loc.*) that what Ezekiel saw corresponded to the Adonis festivals. It may be enough to state, without going into the details of the story, that Adonis, the beautiful youth beloved of Aphrodite, was slain by a wild boar; that after his death he was allowed to spend six months of each year with her, while the other was passed with Persephone in Hades. The cultus thus became the symbol of the annual decay and revival of nature; but the legend rather than the inner meaning was in the thoughts of the worshippers. The emotions of women poured themselves out in lamentations over the waxen image of the beautiful dead youth who had perished in his prime, and in orgiastic joy over his return to life. Milton, deriving his knowledge, probably, from Selden's 'De Diis Syris,' has painted the whole scene in words which may well be quoted—

"Thammuz next came behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all a summer's day;
While smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood
Of Thammuz yearly wounded: the love-tale
Infected Sion's daughters with like heat;
Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
Ezekiel saw, when, by the vision led,
His eyes surveyed the dark idolatries
Of alienated Judah."
('Par. Lost,' i. 446, etc.)

The chief centre of the Tammuz-Adonis worship was Byblos, in Syria, but it spread widely over the shores of the Mediterranean, and was fashionable both in Alexandria and Athens. One of the practices of the festival, that of planting flowers in vases for forced cultivation, has been perpetuated by Plato's allusion to "the gardens of Adonis" as the type of transitoriness ('Phædr.,' p. 376, *b*). Cheyne, following Lagarde, finds a reference to the cultus in Isa. xvii. 10; lxv. 3; lxvi. 17. The festival of Ishtar and Tammuz (or *Tam-zi*) at Babylon presented a marked parallel. Adonis is, with hardly a doubt, identical with the Hebrew *Adonai* (equivalent to "Lord"). *Tammuz* has been explained as meaning "victorious," or "disappearance," or "burning;" but all etymologies are conjectural. Lastly, it is not without interest to note (1) that when Jerome wrote, the Cave of the Nativity at Bethlehem was overshadowed by a grove of Tammuz ('Ep. ad Paul.'); and (2) that the later Jewish calendar included the month of Tammuz, which corresponded to July. The festival seems to have been celebrated at the summer solstice. The time of Ezekiel's vision was in the sixth month, *sc.* about the time of the autumnal equinox (see 'Dict. Bible,' art. "Tammuz"). Mr. Baring-Gould, treating the legend as a solar myth, finds the old Phœnician deity represented in the "St. George of Merrie England" ('Curious Myths,' pp. 277—316). An exhaustive monograph, "Tammuz Adonis," has been published by Liebrecht, in his 'Zur Volkskunde' (1879), reprinted from the *Zeitschrift Deutschen Morgen-Gesellschaft*, vol. xvii. pp. 397, etc.

Ver. 16.—**He brought me into the inner court.** The last and the worst form of desecration follows. It was the "inner court" (Joel ii. 17) which, after the exile, was entered only by the priests. During the monarchy, however, it seems to have been accessible to kings and other persons of importance, as in the case of Solomon (1 Kings viii. 22, 64; ix. 25) in the revolution against Athaliah (2 Kings xi. 4—15), and Hezekiah (2 Kings xix. 14), and Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 2). Ezekiel does not say that the men whom he saw were priests, though the number twenty-five suggests that they were taking the place of the high priest and the heads of the twenty-four courses of the priesthood (1 Chron. xxiv. 19), and so symbolized the whole order of the priesthood as the seventy elders represented the laity. In 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14 the chief of the priests is spoken of as having been prominent in "polluting the house of the Lord." They were seen turning their backs to the temple of Jehovah, *i.e.* the sanctuary. The very act was symbolical of their apostasy (2 Chron. xxix. 6; Isa. i. 4; Jer. vii. 24). And they did this in order that they might look to the east and worship the rising sun. That, and not the temple (Dan. vi. 10), was the *Kiblah* of their adoration. The sun-worship here appears to have had a Persian character, as being offered to the sun itself, and not to Baal, as a solar god. Of such a worship we have traces in Deut. iv. 19; xvii. 3; Job xxxi. 26; 2 Kings xxiii. 5, 11.

Ver. 17.—For **returned** read, with the Revised Version, *turned again*. The word seems chosen with special reference to the attitude of the idol-worshippers. It may be noted that even here the prophet speaks not only of the idolatry of Judah, but of its violence also, as bringing down the judgments of Jehovah. **Lo, they put the branch to their nose.** The opening word expresses the prophet's burning indignation. The act described probably finds its best explanation in the Persian ritual of the Avesta. When men prayed to the sun, they held in their left hands a bouquet of palm, pomegranate, and tamarisk twigs, while the priests for the same purpose held a veil before their mouth (Spiegel, 'Iran. Alterth.,' iii. 571, 572, in Smend), so that the bright rays of the sun might not be polluted by human breath. And this was done in the very temple of Jehovah by those who were polluting the whole land by their violence. The LXX. gives, as an explanation, ὡς μυκτηρίζοντες, as though the act was one of scornful pride (comp. Isa. lxv. 5), the sign of a temper like that of the Pharisee as he looked upon the publican (Luke xviii. 11). Lightfoot takes the "nose" as the symbol of anger, and looks on the phrase as proverbial: "They add the twig to their anger, fuel to the fire;" but this has little to commend it. The word for "branch" is used in ch. xv. 2 and Numb. xiii. 23 for a vine-branch.

Ver. 18.—The verse serves as a transition to ch. ix. The unpitying aspect of the Divine judgments is again prominent. Such sins deserved, and could only be expiated by, the judgments to which we now pass.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*A revelation of fire.* The prophet is visited with a series of new visions under fresh circumstances. No longer walking among the weeping captives by the waters of Babylon, or standing in solitude upon the great plain, Ezekiel is now in his own house receiving a deputation of Jewish leading men, who have evidently been impressed by his earlier prophecies, and who have come to consult him on the condition and prospects of his nation, when he is seized with an inspired rapture. The house and the visitors melt away from his consciousness, and there in the very presence of these waiting and astonished guests the prophet's eyes are opened to a vision of God, and he is carried in imagination to scenes of sin and shame in the temple at Jerusalem. Was ever there a more unlikely time and setting of revelation? Truly the Spirit breatheth where it listeth. God may visit a soul in company as well as in solitude, in the home as well as in the temple or in the seclusion of nature. He is ever-present. The only question is—When and how will the veil be lifted?

I. A VISION OF GOD. It is evidently a Divine appearance, a theophany, that is here portrayed. Not that man at any time can see God with the outward eye, for flesh cannot see spirit. But in vision and representative form God now manifests himself to Ezekiel. 1. *The vision of God precedes the revelation of truth.* It was usual for this great seer of visions, Ezekiel, to have a new series of revelations opened by some overwhelming manifestation of God's presence. The same occurred with St. John's visions in the Apocalypse. We must know God before we can understand Divine truth. The vision of God in the soul must come first. Then truth can be seen in his light. 2. *The vision of God precedes the revelation of man.* Ezekiel is about to see awful sights of sin. He must first behold the pure fire of God's presence. We cannot know man till we see him in the light of God. The Bible that gives us our highest knowledge of God also gives us our deepest insight into man. Vague ideas of God lead to light thoughts of sin. When about to visit the haunts of wickedness, the Christian should first come into communion with God. This will help him to see the horror of sin, to keep himself from contamination, and to feel the right commiseration for the fallen.

II. A VISION OF FIRE. The Divine manifestation seems to have been in a human shape, but in one of fire—burning flames below, brilliant radiance above. 1. *The fire below suggests wrath against sin.* "Our God is a consuming Fire" (Heb. xii. 29). Christ came to baptize with fire, and to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt. iii. 11, 12). There is a righteous indignation against sin, the lack of which would mean moral feebleness. God burns to consume all evil. 2. *The brightness above suggests the supreme glory of God.* The crowning characteristic of God is not wrath. Above the fire is the serene radiance. There is terror in the holiness of God when this touches the sin of man. Yet God himself is supremely calm and beautiful. If we can rise from the flaming wrath about his feet, and behold the beauty of his countenance, we shall see on it the expression of eternal goodness.

Ver. 3.—"*The image of jealousy.*" Ezekiel in vision imagines himself plucked up by a lock of hair and carried from the land of his exile back to Jerusalem, there to behold the abominations that are being practised in the temple of Solomon. In the sacred enclosure he sees an idol that provokes the jealousy of the true God.

I. GOD IS JUSTLY JEALOUS. The Old Testament idea of the jealousy of God has been grossly misapprehended. It has been taken as meaning that God was regarded as narrow, self-seeking, harsh. Such criticisms reveal a total misapprehension of the Old Testament position, according to which the jealousy of God is a necessity of his nature and righteousness. 1. *A necessity of God's nature.* There is but one God who fills all things. When he is represented as jealous, this cannot be because he grudges a certain amount of honour to a rival—as Zeus might be jealous of Apollo—for God has no possible rivals. The supposed rivals are not gods at all. The worship of them is the worship of empty names. God is calling men back from delusion to fact when he is jealous of heathenish worship. 2. *A necessity of righteousness.* Forsaking Jehovah for false gods is not merely leaving one deity for another, nor even only turning aside to vanity and a delusion. It is turning from holiness to sin. The worship of God involves purity of heart and life; idolatry means a lower moral life. For the sake of holiness God cannot endure the lower worship. It might be said that God could be worshipped under various names as "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord." But if the lower forms of worship involve false thoughts of God and evil practices in morals, they are degrading and unendurable.

II. AN IDOL PROVOKES THE JEALOUSY OF GOD. The idol takes the place of God, sits on his throne, defiles his temple, usurps his Name and authority and worship. Anything that works in this way is an idol, and needs to be visited with the just indignation of God. Let us note some of these "images of jealousy." 1. *Pleasure.* If men set pleasure first, guiding their lives by its gaudy radiance, pleasure presides over the altar of their souls. "Love not pleasure, love God," says Carlyle; for the supreme love of the one excludes the supreme love of the other. 2. *Money.* This idol of gold is the modern representative of Nebuchadnezzar's statue on the plain of Shinar —a hard, helpless idol, which the man who lives for money enshrines in the temple of his soul. 3. *Earthly love.* God does not require us to abandon human affection; on the contrary, we cannot love God unless we love man, and we learn to love God best through the exercise of human affections (1 John iv. 20). But when a human affection is supreme and will not yield in submission to the will of God, the object of it becomes an "image of jealousy." 4. *Self-will.* We may think we serve God and yet we may refuse to obey him, only working according to our own will. This also is idolatry. 5. *Fixed opinions.* Instead of loving truth, we are tempted to love our own ideas; wishing them to be true, we are led to regard them as such, and so to shut our minds against the correcting voice of Divine revelation. All these images of jealousy are just so many embodiments of *self*, the monster idol of the soul and rival of God. To cast out these images we need the true Image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ, to come and take possession of our hearts.

Ver. 12.—*Chambers of imagery.* Old men who should have been the guides of the younger generation were found by the prophet to have their secret practices of idolatry in private chambers, where they kept idols unknown to the world at large. Too careful for their reputation to share in the open idolatry of the mass of the people, these venerable hypocrites aggravated their guilt by cowardly deception. Safely ensconced in the seclusion of their chambers of imagery, they revelled in the orgies of a degrading idolatry, and then appeared in the streets as sedate citizens. The shameful sin of this double living may be practised in other forms with another kind of chamber of imagery.

I. EVERY MAN HAS A CHAMBER OF IMAGERY IN HIS OWN HEART. Children and poets are possessed of the most powerful imagination; but even the dullest, most prosaic person is haunted with visionary presences, though of the most commonplace order. When we retire into ourselves, we unlock the door of our chamber of imagery and look at its ghostly scenes. There hang the portraits of the past, some blurred by the dust of years, others as clear as when they were first painted by the flash of a keen experience; some distorted into painful, impossible ugliness, others rounded into equally impossible perfection. There, too, are vague shadows of the future. But the most important images are designs and wishes, favourite fancies and pet ideas. These we embrace as friends; before some of them, perhaps, we prostrate ourselves in idolatrous worship. But happily we may also find there inspiring images of noble deeds, the ideals we would strive to copy in actual life. We may have left them too long in the dim chamber of imagery. We should bring them forth and clothe them with the flesh and blood of living deeds, while the bad images had better be crushed before they reach the doorway of utterance.

II. THERE ARE DEEDS DONE IN THE CHAMBER OF IMAGERY. Lust is there, and adultery, covetousness, theft, hatred, and murder. So long as a man restrains his utterance he is tempted to believe that it matters not what he imagines. No greater delusion can be possible; for the true life is that which is lived within. While in his chamber of imagery, a man is his true self divested of the cloak of semblance which he wears when about in the world. What images does he there delight to gaze upon? The true character of the man will be determined by the answer to that question. Certainly evil images may come there unsought and unloved as painful temptations, and it is the duty of one who loves holiness to turn aside from such. But the images delighted in reveal the true self. The wickedness there planned and gloated over in evil thought is *sin*—a deed of the soul. Ultimately it must come out in the life, for the imagination of the heart colours the external conduct. Shakespeare says—

> "Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons,
> Which, at the first, are scarce found to distaste,
> But, with a little act upon the blood,
> Burn like the mines of sulphur."

III. IT IS A DELUSION TO SUPPOSE THAT GOD IS INDIFFERENT TO WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CHAMBER OF IMAGERY. The old men of Jerusalem comforted themselves with the notion that God did not see them, that he had forsaken the earth. This Ezekiel knew to be a monstrous delusion. 1. *God looks into the chamber of imagery.* There is a window in every soul, through which the eye of God gazes right down to the bottom of its most secret thoughts. He knows us better than we know ourselves. The cloak of hypocrisy is not as the thinnest veil between us and God. Now, this is of supreme interest, because, while it does not very much matter what our fellow-men may think about us, God's thought of us is all-important. 2. *God will judge us for deeds done in the chamber of imagery.* Knowing all, he will not judge only by what the world sees. Sins of the heart will be noted by God, and will bring down upon us his just wrath, even though the hands have been clean from iniquity. 3. *The only effectual salvation must be one that cleanses the chamber of imagery.* "Create in me a clean heart, O God," cries David, in the depth of his penitence, knowing that the outward sins he had committed have sprung from the evil of his imagination. Therefore nothing short of the new birth which Christ brings can save our souls.

Ver. 15.—"*Greater abominations.*" As Ezekiel is taken from one chamber of idolatry to another, in his visionary visit to the temple, he finds to his horror a continuous aggravation of the abominations. This is similar to the results of a survey of the world's sin.

I. SIN IS FOUND IN VARIOUS DEGREES OF ABOMINATION. The patristic statement that all sin is infinite, because it is an offence against the infinite God, is not found in Scripture, nor is it borne out by observation or experience. The Bible refers to various degrees of guilt; *e.g.* John xix. 11. Peter's denial of Christ was a sin; but Judas's betrayal was a vastly greater sin. We are conscious of degrees of guilt in our own lives. It looks as though the sink of iniquity must be a bottomless pit. There are even deeper, blacker, more frightful and damnable sins yet to be reached by an abandoned soul that plunges down an unchecked descent of iniquity. No one is so bad that he can say, "I can do nothing worse than I have done."

II. THE VARIOUS DEGREES OF ABOMINATION CANNOT BE MEASURED BY EXTERNAL STANDARDS. They are not to be determined by any graduated code of formal morality. What is a weakness in one man may be a crime in another. The father of a starving family who steals a loaf—like the hero of Victor Hugo's 'Les Misérables'—is not to be judged as the respectable promoter of rotten investments, who grows rich on the ruin of thousands of helpless people. The miserable child of the London thief, whose training has been at a school of crime, cannot be justly put into comparison with the son of a happy, prosperous Christian home. There are hereditary tendencies to evil and peculiar circumstances of temptation which beset certain people more than others. The degree of guilt varies accordingly. We cannot weigh all these conditions. Hence the advice, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

III. ALL SIN TENDS TO AN AGGRAVATION OF ITS ABOMINATION. As Ezekiel went from one chamber to another, he came upon a continually descending series of scenes of wickedness. The worst were last. Sin is never at a standstill. It is a dark and turbid torrent that swells and blackens as it flows. The man who begins with a slight lapse from virtue is on the road to greater abominations. Herein is the danger, the fatal insidiousness of evil. If the sinner saw the whole course of his future from the first and at once—like Hogarth's pictures of the 'Rake's Progress'—he would start back with horror. Yet while he lingers and toys with sin it is silently coiling about him with more and more direful entanglements.

IV. THE EXISTENCE OF VARIOUS DEGREES OF ABOMINATION IS A REASON FOR SPEEDY REPENTANCE. 1. *All sin is abominable.* One sin may be a greater abomination than another, but the standard of measurement is not the depth below, but the height above. The question is—How far have we fallen? not—How much further may we yet sink away from the light? A man's sin is not one whit the less because his brother's sin is greater in guilt. 2. *The sooner we repent the easier it is to return.* Sin hardens as it becomes more aggravated in evil. While the light of God is waning, the way of recovery is becoming more obscure. "To-day is the accepted time." 3. *It is possible for the greatest abomination to be forgiven.* The obstacle is only on one side. Christ can save the worst of sinners.

Ver. 16.—*Sun-worship.* When Ezekiel, in his visionary visit to the temple, came upon the last scene of horror, and beheld the greatest of all the abominations therein committed, he saw twenty-five men performing rites of worship before the rising sun.

I. SUN-WORSHIP IS MOST FASCINATING. This was the most common, and perhaps also the most primitive, heathen cult. It was very prominent in the ancient Egyptian religion—the rising, the midday, and the setting sun being honoured with separate names and rites; it was the essential idea of the Canaanite Baal-worship, as well as of the Babylonian religion; and it lies at the heart of the Aryan mythology in Sanscrit, Greek, and Teutonic forms. If any material object should be selected for worship, it is natural that the earth's great source of light, power, and life should be the universal favourite. Our modern idolatries do not reach this material form, but they contain the same ideas. 1. *The worship of light.* This takes two forms. (1) *Æstheticism.* Grace of form and tone are set up as supreme objects of admiration, to the neglect of moral goodness. (2) *Science.* This is put on a pinnacle as lord of all thought and life. Now, knowledge is good, and all truth, which is the subject of science, is in itself pure, and should be pursued by men. But the exclusive cult of science is idolatry, because it is placing knowledge above obedience. 2. *The worship of power.* The sun is the great motive power of the universe. Latent sun-heat in coal drives our steam-engines. Direct sun-heat lifts the water from the sea, that afterwards descends in avalanches and mountain torrents. We do not prostrate ourselves before the sun, the source of all this force, but we do magnify the virtue of the power itself. Yet material resources are not the highest good. 3. *The worship of life.* The sun is the great fertilizing influence of nature. The return of its warm rays awakens nature from the death of winter, and creates the new life of spring; its great heat makes the tropics to teem with swift-growing vegetable and insect life. The most modern idolatry is the deification of the vital powers—the idea that, as all natural instinct is pure, the indulgence of naturalism is commendable. This is just the old Canaanite abomination. 4. *The worship of the future.* The sun-worshipper turned to the east and hailed the sunrise. There is something fascinating and exhilarating in this anticipation of the morning. Christianity consecrates hope. But it is a mistake to believe in the future as in a fate of coming good. The future can only be good because God is in it, and blesses it.

II. SUN-WORSHIP IS MOST ABOMINABLE. It includes many evil things. 1. *Departure from God.* The sun-worshippers stood with their backs turned towards the temple. Their attitude was most significant. All idolatry must be practised with the back turned towards the truly Divine. We cannot serve the false and the true at one and the same time. 2. *The degradation of God's greatest works.* The more beautiful and powerful and fruitful the sun is seen to be, the more shameful is it that men should degrade their thought of it into idolatry. When we abuse God's best gifts by idolizing them, we turn what should occasion our deepest gratitude and admiration for God's goodness into an occasion for departing from him. 3. *The consecration of sin.* Sun-worship began in adoration of the lord of day. But it descended into gross licentiousness, through the selection of the fertilizing power of sun-heat as a special object of adoration. Thus sun-worship became the worship of lust. This will be the inevitable effect of naturalism regarded as a religion. The worship of nature-powers pure and simple involves the consecration of the lowest of those powers, so that what should be kept down as a slave claims to rule as a master, with obscene effrontery.

CONCLUSION. The rescue from nature-worship—modern as well as ancient—is to be found in the revelation of One infinitely greater than nature. No wonder men who had no vision of the spiritual God selected the sun—so powerful in his southern splendour—as the greatest object of adoration. But we have "the Sun of Righteousness," before whose glory all physical brightness grows pale and fades away.

Ver. 17.—*Making light of sin.* I. SINNERS MAKE LIGHT OF SIN. This is a commonly observed fact. Let us see how it is caused. 1. *As an attempt to excuse the sinner.* This, of course, is the most obvious and palpable reason why many people try to minimize their own sin. The prisoner pleads "Not guilty" simply to save himself. The same is done even before the private bar of a man's own conscience; for we wish to excuse ourselves to ourselves. Thus there may be no conscious deception, no hypocrisy. We may really persuade ourselves that we are not so bad as we seem to be. The wish is father to the thought. 2. *By the force of habit.* We grow accustomed to the worst companions if we are much with them, as we scarcely notice the ugliness of what is constantly with us, though strangers would be struck with their first sight of it. So while we become familiar with our sins, their supreme and most dreadful wickedness ceases to affect us, as the fearful sight of mutilated bodies ceases to affect hospital surgeons. The horror dies out of the aspect of wickedness, and a look of familiarity takes its place. 3. *Through the influence of example.* If a man stood alone in his sin, he would be appalled at the singular horror of it. But he sees it reflected in the lives of his neighbours, and, judging himself by the average standard of society, instead of taking the Law of God for his measure, he passes an easy sentence. 4. *In the deadening of conscience.* This is the worst and the most dangerous effect of sin. The sense for perceiving its guilt is blunted. Until conscience is reawakened by the Spirit of God, no man truly appreciates his own guilt.

II. It is impossible for God to make light of sin. 1. *He sees it as it truly is.* God is not deceived by our excuses. He sees into the true nature of our thought and conduct with an all-searching eye, and he is perfectly true and just to judge according to fact. 2. *God measures it by the law of holiness.* He knows our weakness, our ignorance, our temptation; and he does not judge men as he would judge angels—of that we may be sure; for "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" But according as we have light he will estimate our conduct, measuring it against that light, and not against the darkness of our neighbours. God cannot endure iniquity. In his sight it is hideous and hateful and utterly deserving of condemnation. Let us remember that we shall not be judged by man's standards of conventionality, but by God's pure law of righteousness. 3. *If God forgives sin, he does not make light of it.* Forgiveness is not excusing evil. It recognizes the whole black guilt of it. Jesus who brought free forgiveness denounced sin itself as no stern Hebrew prophet had ventured to denounce it. In pardoning the penitent he carefully noted that her sins were "many" (Luke vii. 47). The publican is commended for his humiliation in the confession of sin (Luke xviii. 13). We can only judge of God's horror of sin by the darkness and agony of Gethsemane and Calvary. God forgives sin at the cost of his own Son. The great atonement of Christ was rendered necessary because God could not make light of sin, though he desired to save the sinner. We can be saved from our sin, not by making light of it, but when we fully confess its whole guilt and shame.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 4, 5.—*The glory of God and the image of jealousy.* In prophetic vision Ezekiel was transported from the place of exile to his country's metropolis, and to the temple which was the very centre of his people's religious observances. It may not be certain whether what in this vision he discerned actually took place, or whether the vision was representative and symbolical of what was occurring elsewhere in Judah and even in Jerusalem. But what an extraordinary juxtaposition and contrast is that described in these verses! One observer in one spot is brought face to face both with the splendour of the Divine manifestation and with the horror of idolatrous rites!

I. The glory of the God of Israel. The prophet beheld an appearance of splendour, such as he had previously beheld in the plain, and had described in an earlier passage of his prophecies. 1. This appearance was emblematical of the Divine attributes; alike of God's power to punish and to save, and of his moral excellences, justice and truth, mercy and love. 2. This appearance was peculiarly suitable to the place where it was discerned: the temple of Jehovah was his dwelling-place, and the scene of his peculiar presence, who giveth not his glory to another. 3. This appearance was a reminder that for the Jewish people there was one, and only one, proper Object of adoration and worship.

II. THE IDOLATROUS IMAGE. 1. This was doubtless a figure of one of the false gods worshipped by one of the nations in the neighbourhood of Palestine, by whom Judah had been corrupted and seduced. Which of the several idols was at that time worshipped by the Jews we are not told; and, indeed, this does not signify. 2. Whatever this imaginary deity may have been, it is certain that the attributes assigned to it were opposed to those belonging to Jehovah. Cruelty and impurity were certainly qualities attributed to this false god. 3. Thus moral degradation was involved in the worship of this image; degradation all the more signal because the Jews forsook a God of righteousness and clemency, and fashioned or accepted an imaginary deity embodying their own worst faults and vices.

III. THE INDIGNATION WITH WHICH JEHOVAH REGARDED JUDAH'S PREFERENCE. The image was an "image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy." The reasons why the idol should be so designated, why such should be the way in which it was regarded, are obvious enough. 1. Jehovah had enjoined upon the posterity of Abraham abstinence from the idolatries from which the great forefather of the chosen people had been delivered. Monotheism was the very stamp and seal of their election. 2. The very first and second commandments of the first table of the moral Law prohibited idolatry. 3. The history of Israel had been one long rebuke of idolatry, and one long warning against falling into this seductive snare. 4. The ordinances and institutions of the nation were expressly designed to act as a check and dissuasive against the sin of the surrounding and heathen nations.

APPLICATION. Apostasy from the service of the one living and true God is rendered inexcusable, and is worthy of severe condemnation, when, as in the case of Judah, *and in our case*, light is clear, privileges are many, and opportunities and inducements abound to be faithful and diligent in the practice of pure religion.—T.

Ver. 10.—*Base idolatry.* Placed, as the children of Israel were, in a very central position among the nations, they were exposed to a great variety of temptations. Circumstances must sometimes have favoured the influence of one nation, sometimes of another. Commercial intercourse, political leagues, matrimonial alliances, all had a share in determining which nation should predominate in influencing the Jewish people. And it is certain that by such influences the people were led into idolatries of different kinds. Egypt, as the neighbour of Israel upon the south, naturally came again and again into contact with the people who had been by Divine power delivered from her hands. Probably some relics of Egyptian superstition lingered for generations among the Jews, and it seems certain that efforts were made to introduce the deities and idolatrous worship of Egypt among the professed worshippers of Jehovah. This verse obviously refers to the practice of Egyptian idolatry in the capital, and in the very temple courts.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THIS IDOLATRY. 1. It was the worship of living creatures. 2. And of the lowest forms of life. This we know to have been especially characteristic of the religion of ancient Egypt.

II. THE VILENESS AND ABSURDITY OF THIS IDOLATRY. 1. It was the elevation of the creature above the Creator. 2. It was the glorification of animal in preference to spiritual life. 3. It manifested itself in the most irrational and indefensible forms which so-called religion could possibly assume. 4. It lowered the worshippers to a moral level of degradation below which it was scarcely possible to sink.

III. THE GUILT OF THE JEWS IN PRACTISING THIS IDOLATRY. 1. They forsook the pure and elevating worship of the living and true God, preferring the vile to the precious, the disgusting to the sublime. 2 They acted in a manner contrary to all the lessons of their past history. 3. They rebelled against the authoritative admonitions of the Lord's faithful prophets. In all these respects the Hebrew people were far more blamable than the surrounding nations who had been trained in idolatrous practice and had never declined from a purer and nobler faith and worship.—T.

Ver. 12.—*Atheism.* In the chambers of the temple courts the prophet in his vision beheld seventy elders, representing the people of Judah and Israel, engaged in idolatrous worship. The walls of the chambers were decorated with figures of the animals to which homage was rendered. Those who by reason of character and station should have been the leaders of the people in the offices of pure religion were engaged in waving the censers of the idolatrous worship, and the thick cloud of unholy incense filled the chambers. As the prophet gazed appalled at this awful spectacle, the voice of the Lord addressed him: "Hast thou seen what they do? They say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." Here was the true explanation of the defection of the Jews—leaders and common people alike. It was atheism which led to idolatry. And atheism is far more generally at the root of all evils in society than many superficial observers are willing to allow.

I. THE ELEMENTS OF ATHEISM. There are many who are not professedly and openly atheists, who are such in reality. They may not cast aside the Name of God, they may not openly repudiate the Law of God; but in their hearts they believe not in him. There may be recognized on their part: 1. Disbelief in the Lord's omniscient observation of men. "They say, The Lord seeth us not." 2. Disbelief in the Lord's presence and activity. "They say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth." Whoever they may be who make these assertions, and whatever their standing among their fellow-men, they are practically and really atheistic.

II. THE OPERATION OF ATHEISM. It is impossible that such disbelief as that described should be without influence upon the moral nature and conduct. 1. Atheism removes the restraints from sin which belief in the Divine presence imposes. This is not the highest view to take of the question, but it is a just one; and many natures are largely influenced by the knowledge that an all-seeing God regards all their ways and thoughts. 2. Atheism removes the inspiration to goodness which belief in the Divine presence furnishes. The knowledge that a holy and omnipotent Father is ever with us, is ever ready to encourage and assist us in all our endeavours to realize our highest ideal, must needs be a factor of great importance in our spiritual life. Let this be withheld or contradicted, and how much that is best must be withdrawn along with it!

III. THE FRUITS OF ATHEISM. 1. Among these Jews at Jerusalem disbelief in Jehovah led to superstition and idolatry—no unusual conjunction. 2. Very generally, atheism leads to self-indulgence and vice. 3. And it is destructive of all higher national life. Fidelity to God is fidelity to principle, fidelity to society, fidelity to the highest conception formed of human life. Infidelity to God involves the opposite of all these virtues, and abandonment to the life of interest, of ease, of pleasure; it gives power to every temptation to sin, to every evil tendency of society. Under its influence man sinks to the merely animal life, and to such mental activity as subserves that life.

APPLICATION. We are sometimes told that in speculative atheism there is no great harm; that without belief in God men may be good citizens, and may discharge honourably the several relationships of life. Without denying that, in certain instances, the influence of Christianity may for a time abide after Christianity itself has been abandoned, we have yet to look at the proper and inevitable consequences of a general abandonment of belief in God. We shall find these so terrible, that we may well watch and pray against the first loosenings of belief in the most fundamental and precious of all truths.—T.

Ver. 14.—"*Weeping for Tammuz.*" If the usual interpretation of this passage is correct, then it is clear that there had been introduced from Northern Syria into Jerusalem a superstitious practice and cultus, which was altogether alien from the beliefs and the worship proper to the nation whom the Supreme had favoured with a clear and glorious revelation of his blessed character and his holy will. It is an illustration of the weakness and proneness to err characteristic of our humanity, that a nation so favoured as Judah should borrow from their neighbours religious rites and observances utterly inconsistent with their own religion, and of a kind fitted to degrade rather than to exalt the moral life. We may observe of this special superstition—

I. THAT IT SUBSTITUTED FICTION FOR TRUTH.

II. THAT IT CONCENTRATED ATTENTION UPON NATURE INSTEAD OF UPON THE AUTHOR OF NATURE.

III. THAT IT SUBSTITUTED AN IMAGINATIVE AND FANCIFUL FOR A REAL AND LEGITIMATE CAUSE OF EMOTION.

IV. THAT IT PROMOTED VICE INSTEAD OF MORAL PURITY.

V. THAT IT CONSEQUENTLY DEGRADED THE NATION THAT SUFFERED ITSELF TO BE SEDUCED BY IT.

APPLICATION. No nation and no individual is superior to the necessity of watchfulness against the contaminating influence of neighbours upon a lower moral platform. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Instead of the good leavening the evil, and so purifying the mass, the contrary may happen, and the defiling influence of error and impurity may spread. In this case there is every likelihood of the fulfilment of the proverb, "The companion of fools shall be destroyed."—T.

Ver. 16.—*Sun-worshippers in Jerusalem.* Although the worship of Baal and other similar deities was no doubt a corruption due to the personification of the great orb of day, it does not seem that, in this passage, the prophet intends to denounce that form of idolatry. It appears that actual sun-worship, which we know to have been practised among the Persians, obtained in the time of Ezekiel at Jerusalem, though it is scarcely credible that it took place literally in the circumstances depicted in the context.

I. THE SUN-WORSHIP ITSELF. Of this it is enough to say that it is creature-worship, and is therefore dishonouring to the Creator who kindled the sun in the firmament, and who is himself the eternal, uncreated Light.

II. THE SUN-WORSHIPPERS. 1. They included the priesthood; for the five and twenty here mentioned were doubtless the heads of the twenty-four courses, with the high priest presiding over them. 2. Their attitude was indicative of profanity and defection; they are depicted as turning their backs towards the temple of Jehovah that they might face the sun as he rose in the east.

III. THE EFFECTS OF SUN-WORSHIP. 1. This superstition estranged the minds of those who practised it from the God who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all; it rendered them indifferent to the Divine Law, and inattentive to the Divine service and worship. 2. It was the means of filling the land with abominations and violence, and this was especially the case when conjoined with the worship of the Phœnician sun-god. 3. It thus became one of the many occasions for the arousing of the anger of God, and led to the retributions and chastenings which speedily came upon the ungrateful, unspiritual, and apostate people.—T.

Vers. 1—16.—*Gradual disclosure of human sin.* The prophet notes the exact date of the vision, so that, if any doubt arose, the circumstance could be verified, so long as any one of these elders survived. These details of day and month may seem to many readers needless and tedious; yet, in an earlier day, they probably served an important purpose, and may be again useful in a future age. Even now they demonstrate with what diligent care the prophet preserved the records of Divine manifestations. The three hundred and ninety days during which Ezekiel was to be a living sign were now fulfilled.

I. THE OCCASION. The occasion arose out of a visit made to Ezekiel by the elders of Israel. Genuine inquiry on the part of men is always pleasing to God. If men ask after truth from righteous motive, God is prepared to meet them. The response from heaven may not be in the *mode* men expect, yet some response there will be. On this occasion, too, *God* was honoured in the person of his messenger. It becomes us to use those channels for information which God has opened. If we are at our Sovereign's footstool, we shall not have long to wait.

II. GOD'S GRACIOUS MANIFESTATION. It was an act of grace that God should reveal himself to his prophet, so that through the prophet he might reveal himself to the elders. In every age God has chosen the most fitting agencies through which to manifest himself to men. 1. *It was an exact repetition of a former appearance.* This was to intimate that God's designs had in no respect changed. There were the same splendours of majesty—the unchangeable glory—of Jehovah; there was the same appearance of radiant fire in the loins and feet, to indicate that he was about to march through the land in righteous indignation. "Verily, a fire goeth before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about." "For he cometh to judge the earth." 2. *A mighty energy was put forth.* There was the form of a hand, by which the prophet was lifted up. From first to last we need Divine assistance. So feeble is human nature, that at every step we need gracious succour, both to learn and to do God's will. We must be separated from earthly scenes—have elevation of mind—if we would see things as God sees them. 3. *Personal effort.* There was place and scope for the prophet's exertion. Man must co-operate with God. "I beheld." Ezekiel must use his eyes. In that state of ecstasy to which he had been raised there is need for special activity. Human nature at present cannot long endure the ecstatic state. Golden opportunities such as these are brief. Therefore note well the precious lessons.

III. The gradual disclosures of Israel's guilt. The glory of God was manifest in the temple. 1. *In the clear light of Jehovah's presence we see the real character of sin.* The eye of man needs the medium of light through which to discern objects; and a special revelation of God is required in which to discover the turpitude of sin. It was when God came near to Job that this exemplary man exclaimed, "I abhor myself." It was when Christ first revealed his glory to Peter that he put up the prayer, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." 2. *All forms of idolatry provoke God's jealous anger.* We take this "image of jealousy" as an allegorical representation of the many-sided idolatry of Israel. Whatever forms their idolatries assumed, they all had *this* in common—they usurped Jehovah's place; they supplanted his authority. In stupendous condescension, God speaks to us after the manner of a man. As the strongest passion which fallen man knows is jealousy, so God represents *this* as the picture of indignant sentiment in his own breast. He sets high value on our human love. It is the most precious thing we can give him. Hence, we wound him in the tenderest part when we erect a rival in his place. This is a root-sin. 3. *Sin becomes most heinous of all sin when committed in the temple.* God's dwelling-place on earth is designed to be a fount, whence streams of blessing may flow to every province of our human life. To defile this fount is to send a stream of pollution into the domestic, commercial, and political life of the nation. If there be idolatry in the temple, there will be idolatry in the home; there will be disorder everywhere. The sanctuary will always be a source of life or of death to the whole empire. 4. *God's disclosures of our sin are gradual.* This method has two advantages: (1) It gives us a clearer conception of the magnitude and the degrees of sin. (2) It serves to deepen impression, while it does not overwhelm us with despair. If we desire to know the truth respecting our sin, God's Spirit will lead us from point to point, so that we may have an ever-deepening sense of our iniquity.

IV. The heinousness of Israel's offence. 1. *Its secrecy.* The prophet had to break through the wall in order to discover it. Men will often indulge secretly in sins which they are ashamed to commit *openly*. The censure of our fellow-men is often a useful deterrent. The opinion of others is a mirror, in which we see ourselves. Every man has his "chamber of imagery" within. Idolatry in the heart precedes the idolatry of temple-worship. Can we not find some image of evil painted on the walls of our imagination—some form of mammon, or pleasure, or self? Therefore "keep thy heart with all diligence." 2. *The deceitfulness of sin.* It had blinded men's eyes to the fact of God's presence—to the fact of certain discovery and certain retribution. A growing acquaintance with sin convinces us of its many wiles to deceive. Few men venture to sin until they forget God's omniscience; and the habit of forgetfulness leads swiftly to atheism. 3. *The sin was spread by most pernicious example.* The men who ought to have been beacons and bulwarks against idolatry were pioneers in iniquity. Men holding high rank, whether in Church or in state, cannot sin as others do. Their influence is enormous, and it is inevitable that they lead others to heaven or to hell. Every station has its responsibilities. If, in Israel, the princes and elders had set a high example of pious obedience, in all likelihood the fortunes of the nation had been retrieved. If the helmsman be blind, there is small chance for the safety of the ship. 4. *This sin is seminal; it soon produces a brood of other sins.* Idolatry blossomed into sensual lust—into vice, disorder, and violence. The idolatries of the heathen suited the popular taste, because they did not curb natural inclination; gave a dangerous licence to every sensual and selfish passion. *They* who have driven from the heart the love of God are soon filled with every vile affection. They who have ceased to fear God soon cease to have any regard for others' weal. Sin rapidly generates a swarm noxious vices. The women who wept for Tammuz at the door of the temple were, without doubt, living in shameless prostitution. To depart from God is to run into every excess of iniquity. The more we examine the matter, the more flagrant and aggravated human sin appears. Superficial observers may talk of sin as a mere bagatelle; but they who search out the matter conclude that language is too poor to describe the cursed thing. It is the heaviest calamity that can rest on a human being; worse than poverty, or pain, or ill-repute, or desertion, or death: "*He is in danger of eternal sin.*"—D.

Vers. 17, 18.—*Men co-assessors in judgment with God.* In saving men from sin, God qualifies them for the highest offices in his kingdom. "They shall sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'

I. GOD GIVES US, IN STAGES, HIS VIEW OF HUMAN GUILT. Without question, we should take very low and imperfect conceptions of sin, unless God revealed to us the facts in the moral department of existence. By such means, God condescends to train us for companionship with himself, and for high office in his realm. "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

II. GOD SHOWS US FURTHER THE MANIFOLD EFFECTS OF HUMAN SIN. 1. *Its inexcusableness.* It is not committed from want of knowledge. *Those* in Judæa who had the clearest access to knowledge respecting God yielded to idolatry. 2. *Its effect upon others.* All sin is contagious; and when exhibited in the lives of learned and official personages, it has peculiar fascination. The mystic force of influence diffuses it far and wide. 3. *Its penetrative power.* It touches and taints every part of man's nature—body, soul, and spirit. It defiles every department of human life and interest—agriculture, commerce, literature, legislation, the household. 4. *Its cumulative energy.* It grows worse and worse, until every restraint is broken down, and all sense of shame is destroyed. Open defiance of God is the last phase of iniquity.

III. GOD SUMMONS OUR JUDGMENT TO ASSESS THE GUILT. God appeals to his prophet for his estimate of the case. "Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is *this* a light thing?" Our judgment, our reason, our moral sensibility, our conscience, have been conferred upon us for this selfsame purpose, viz. that we should condemn what is evil and approve what is good. Under certain circumstances it is our duty not to judge; as, for instance, when all the facts of the case are not within our possession, or when sympathetic help is better than critical examination, or when our judging faculty is better exercised about ourselves than about others. Our good, and the world's advantage, must be our guide when to judge and when not to pass a judgment.

IV. GOD DESIRES TO HAVE OUR ACQUIESCENCE IN HIS DECISIONS. He puts great honour upon men in making them partners with him in the highest offices of the heavenly state. God is no lover of monopoly. As his creatures become fitted for eminent office and honour, he promotes them. To give them pleasure is to give himself pleasure. If any of his creatures become as wise and pure and good as he is, he will not repine. He calls us his sons and daughters; and inasmuch as the relationship is *real*, he loves to have our companionship, ay, and our hearty approval of all that he does. When Christ shall sit as Judge, in glorious state, we are told that all the *holy* angels shall sit with him. And if he will come to "be admired by his saints," he will desire to have admiration for his *deeds* as well as for his *Person*. "He shall be justified" by his people "as often as he judges."—D.

Vers. 1—6.—*The vision of the image of jealousy.* "And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month," etc. This and the following three chapters are one discourse, or the record of one vision. In this chapter we see how the prophet was transported in spirit to the temple at Jerusalem, and caused to behold the open and the secret idolatrous abominations of which the people of Israel were guilty. Several portions of these verses have already engaged our attention in other connections. Moreover, vers. 1—4 are merely introductory to the vision; but the following points may perhaps be considered by us with advantage.

I. THE ELDERS SEEKING COUNSEL OF THE PROPHET OF THE LORD. "I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me." It has been suggested that this was on the sabbath day, and that the elders were accustomed to meet thus on that day to hear the Word of the Lord from Ezekiel, and to unite in the worship of the Lord their God. But others are of opinion that the occasion was an extraordinary one, and that they were assembled to seek counsel or comfort from the prophet. Whatever the occasion might have been, there can be but little doubt that they were endeavouring to obtain some communication of the Divine will. Thus in the troubles of their captivity, when removed from their temple, and deprived of the regular ordinances of religion, these elders of Judah seem to have been more attentive to the prophet of Jehovah than they were when they had their religious privileges in full. When the vision had become rare, it was prized. It is our sin and loss that our blessings are often not justly and adequately valued until we have lost them wholly or in part.

> "What we have we prize not to the worth,
> Whiles we enjoy it; but being lack'd and lost,
> Why, then we rack the value; then we find
> The virtue, that possession would not show us
> Whiles it was ours."
>
> (Shakespeare.)

Wise and blessed are they who duly prize their good and perfect gifts while in the possession and enjoyment of them.

II. THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE PROPHET OF THE LORD. Ezekiel had been inspired previously. The Spirit of God had moved him mightily before; but now the hand of the Lord came again upon him. New services require new inspirations. Fresh duties demand for their worthy discharge fresh impartations of strength. Each day we need the renewal of grace and strength from above. We discover in the prophet a triple effect of Divine inspiration. 1. *Strengthening him.* "The hand of the Lord God fell there upon me." (We have spoken of this in our remarks on ch. i. 3.) 2. *Exalting him.* "And he put forth the form of an hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem." While Ezekiel was sitting there amidst the elders of Judah, his spirit was exalted and carried away to Jerusalem. The inspiration of God raises the human spirit above its ordinary level, stimulates it into greater and nobler activities, and renders it more capable of receiving Divine impressions and communications. 3. *Enlightening him.* The Spirit enlightened the prophet by quickening his spirit to perceive Divine visions, and by unfolding those visions unto him. (See our remarks on ch. i. 1, "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.")

III. THE SPIRITUAL VISIONS GRANTED UNTO THE PROPHET OF THE LORD. 1. *A vision of the glory of the Lord God.* "Then I beheld, and lo a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance . . . as the colour of amber. . . . And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain." Thus the prophet himself informs us that this vision of the glory of God corresponds with one which he saw before, and which we have already noticed (on ch. i. 26—28). 2. *A vision of the dishonour done to the Lord God.* The prophet was transported in spirit "to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. . . . So I lifted up mine eyes the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry." Many have thought that this was an image of Baal. Lightfoot concluded that it was an image of Moloch. Others are of opinion that it was an image of Asherah or Astarte, which is mentioned in 2 Kings xxi. 7; xxiii. 4, 7, and incorrectly translated in the Authorized Version "grove." It has been suggested that it was an image of the Tammuz or Adonis mentioned in ver. 14, "and called 'the image that provoked to jealousy,' with special reference to the youthful and attractive beauty of the object it represented." The view of Fairbairn seems to us the most probable. "We are disposed to think," he says, "from the ideal character of the representation, that it should not be limited to any specific deity. The prophet, we are persuaded, purposely made the expression general, as it was not so much the particular idol placed on a level with Jehovah, as the idol-worship itself, which he meant to designate and condemn. So sunk and rooted were the people in the idolatrous feeling, that where Jehovah had an altar, there some idol-form must have its '*seat* —a fixed residence, to denote that it was no occasional thing its being found there, but a regular and stated arrangement. And whatever it might for the time be—whether it was Baal, or Moloch, or Astarte, that the image represented—as it was necessarily set up for a rival of Jehovah, to share with him in the worship to which he alone was entitled, it might justly be denominated 'the image of jealousy,' as it provoked that jealousy, and called for that visitation of wrath, against which the Lord had so solemnly warned his people in the second commandment." "The image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy," is an expression which looks back to Deut. xxxii. 16, 21: "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger." Thus Ezekiel beheld the Lord Jehovah dishonoured by his own people, and at the gate of his own altar. And being thus dishonoured, Jehovah abandons his temple. "He said unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?" When that sanctuary has been grossly polluted with idols he will no longer dwell there. And this is applicable to the Church of Jesus Christ. If a spirit of pride, worldliness, or selfishness become predominant in any Christian community, he departs far off from it. If any idol of creed, or ritual, or fashion, or popularity be established therein, he will go far away. And this is applicable also to the human heart. If we give the devotion of our hearts to another object or objects, he will leave us. He claims our supreme affection. He will not have any rival for our love.—W. J.

Vers. 7—13.—*The chambers of imagery; or, secret sins.* "And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall," etc. In the case of "the image of jealousy" the idolatry of the Israelites was open; in this case it is secret. In that the abominations were committed by the house of Israel; in this by the elders of the house of Israel. The paragraph suggests several observations on secret sins.

I. THE MOST HEINOUS SINS ARE GENERALLY COMMITTED IN SECRET. These chambers of imagery, in which the elders of the house of Israel did their wicked abominations, were concealed and difficult of access. The secrecy with which their vile sins were committed is graphically set forth in the text. "He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall," etc.[1] The idolatry practised in these chambers of imagery was the animal-worship of the Egyptians. The prophet beheld "every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall." Such idolatry indicates deep spiritual degradation, and by its influence it increases that degradation. It is fitly characterized as "the wicked abominations that they do." Hengstenberg well says, "Every thing created, however good it may be in itself, becomes an abomination as soon as it stands with man beside, or quite about, God." What a fall for the elders of Israel, from the elevating worship of the true and holy God to the debasing adoration of cattle and creeping things! And they must have felt the wrongness of this, or they would not have so carefully striven to conceal it. There are secret sins in the lives even of good men—sins of thought and feeling that are hidden from our fellow-men. Who could bear to have everything that transpires in his mind and heart exposed to the gaze of even his tenderest and best human friend; or, indeed, to any one except the merciful and holy One?

"Or what if Heaven for once its searching light
Lent to some partial eye, disclosing all
The rude bad thoughts, that in our bosom's night
Wander at large, nor heed Love's gentle thrall?

"Who would not shun the dreary uncouth place?
As if, fond leaning where her infant slept,
A mother's arm a serpent should embrace:
So might we friendless live, and die unwept.

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[1] An interesting description of these chambers, and the mode of access to them, as illustrated by Egyptian chambers of imagery, will be found in Kitto's 'Daily Bible Illustrations'

"Then keep the softening veil in mercy drawn,
Thou who canst love us, tho' thou read us true;
As on the bosom of th' aërial lawn
Melts in dim haze each coarse ungentle hue."
(Keble.)

But the secret sins most analogous to those of the text are those which are practised wilfully. Could we read the chambers of imagery in human hearts, what pictures of sins tolerated, and even indulged in some, we should see, while the lives present a fair exterior! Secret impurities, veiled dishonesties, concealed jealousies and animosities, and hidden idolatries, would appear before us in appalling shapes and colours, and perhaps in astounding numbers.

II. THE MOST HEINOUS SINS ARE SOMETIMES COMMITTED SECRETLY BY THOSE WHO ARE UNDER THE STRONGEST OBLIGATIONS TO ESCHEW THEM. "And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel," etc. (ver. 11). (On the "seventy men of the ancients," cf. Exod. xxiv. 1, 9; Numb. xi. 16, 24, 25.) 1. *The seventy elders may be viewed as representing the whole people, and thus indicating the general corruption.* In accordance with this view, the entire nation is represented as having fallen from its high and holy calling into this grovelling superstition. And with comparatively few exceptions the whole house of Israel had departed from the pure worship of the Lord Jehovah. 2. *The seventy elders may be viewed as showing the corruption of those who should have been most incorruptible.* They were the representatives and counsellors of the people, and as such they were morally bound by advice and example to have endeavoured to keep the people from idolatrous associations, and to have maintained in its integrity the worship of the true God; yet they fell themselves into abominable idolatries. More than once, persons standing highest in religious position have been amongst the lowest in their real character. Such was the case with the scribes and Pharisees during the time of our Lord's life upon earth (cf. Matt. xxiii. 13—33). Exalted religious position or office is no guarantee of exalted spiritual excellence.

III. THE PRACTICE OF SECRET SINS SPRINGS FROM PRACTICAL ATHEISM. "For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth." Here is a twofold denial. 1. *Denial of the Divine observation of human life and conduct.* "The Lord seeth us not." The attempt at concealment implies the fact that they ignored the all-seeing eye. The practice of sin generally involves the overlooking or ignoring of the presence and observation of God. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Let this become a conviction, let it be realized as a solemn fact, and sin would become an impossibility, at any rate with most persons. 2. *Denial of the Divine interest in human life.* "The Lord hath forsaken the earth." Their feeling seems to have been this: "God does not care for us; he is indifferent to what we do, or what becomes of us." "As he does nothing for them, they must help themselves as well as they can." This practical atheism is the prolific parent of secret and other sins. If man realized the deep concern of God for his well-being, in that realization, he would have a most effectual restraint from sin.

IV. THE FACT OF THE EXISTENCE OF SECRET SINS DEMANDS THE EARNEST CONSIDERATION OF THE FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF GOD. "He said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. . . . Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?" Thus the prophet was summoned to consider the secret idolatries which were being practised by the elders of Israel. It is important that the faithful servants of God should consider the existence and practice of secret sins: 1. *To qualify them for battling with such sins.* The reformer must become acquainted with the full measure and force of the evils which he would abolish, if he would succeed in his mission. And the physician, if he would overcome disease, must know it in its inner workings as well as in its outer manifestations. So also is it with him who would wage war against sin. 2. *To qualify them for estimating the righteousness of God's treatment of sinners.* To appreciate how just and true he is in all his dealings with men, it is necessary to consider the sins of mind and heart which are committed against him, as well as those of the tongue and hands.

V. THE MOST CAREFULLY CONCEALED SINS WILL ASSUREDLY BE MADE MANIFEST.

God is perfectly acquainted with every one of them. Our secret sins are set in the light of his countenance (cf. Ps. xc. 8). The revelation to the prophet of the wicked abominations practised in the dark in the chambers of imagery, is suggestive of the unveiling of all secret sins. 1. *In the present life circumstances sometimes arise which occasion the revelation of hidden sins.* Afflictions sometimes strip off the mask from the face of the hypocrite. Or the near approach of death leads to the acknowledgment of concealed vice or crime. 2. *In the future life there will be an awful revelation of human character and conduct.* "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." "Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts."

CONCLUSION. 1. "Create in me a clean heart, O God;" "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." 2. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."—W. J.

Vers. 14—18.—*Man's provocations of God, and God's punishment of man.* "Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north," etc.

I. MAN'S PROVOCATIONS OF GOD. In ver. 17 it is said, "They returned to provoke me to anger." The sins mentioned in this paragraph were not the only provocations of the Most High, as the words of the clause imply. Professor Cheyne translates, "provoke me to anger again and again." And Ewald, "exasperated me repeatedly." The various idolatries and other sins committed by the people were so many provocations of the Lord. But as to those mentioned in the text, notice: 1. *The foul idolatry of the women.* "He brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz." The meaning of Tammuz is not certain, but the conjecture which is by far the most probable is that it is the Hebrew and Syriac name for the heathen god Adonis, who, according to the fable, was the beautiful paramour of Venus. He was said to have been killed by a boar in the chase, and afterwards to have returned to life. The worship of Adonis took its rise at Byblos, in Phœnicia. "From Byblos it spread widely over the East, and was thence carried to Greece." It was probably introduced to the Jews from Syria. The festival of Adonis was celebrated in the fourth month (corresponding to portions of our June and July). This celebration "was of a twofold character: first, that of mourning, in which the death of Adonis was bewailed with extravagant sorrow; and then, after a few days, the mourning gave place to wild rejoicings for his restoration to life. This was a revival of nature-worship under another form—the death of Adonis symbolized the suspension of the productive powers of nature, which were in due time revived. Accordingly, the time of this festival was the summer solstice, when in the East nature seems to wither and die under the scorching heat of the sun, to burst forth again into life at the due season" ('Speaker's Commentary'). For seven days the women gave themselves up to this lamentation, chanting mournful songs to the accompaniment of pipes, cutting their breasts with knives, and either cutting off their hair as a sacrifice to the god, or presenting to him the more costly and shocking sacrifice of their chastity. Well does Fairbairn say, "This Phœnician abomination had become one of the festering sores of Judah's disease." 2. *The idolatry of the men.* "And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord," etc. (ver. 16). Most expositors follow Lightfoot in regarding these five and twenty men as the presidents of the twenty-four orders into which the priesthood was divided (1 Chron. xxiv.), with the high priest at their head; and thus they look upon them as representing the entire priesthood. This, however, is by no means certain. As a matter of fact, the priesthood as a whole had never given themselves up to idolatry. Professor Cheyne says, "The number (twenty-five) is a round one, as in ch. xi. 1. Had it been stated that the men were priests, we might have supposed that they were the heads of the twenty-four courses, together with the high priest. But no; they were 'elders' (ch. ix. 6), *i.e.* laymen. The inner court was not closed to the laity till after the return from exile (see 1 Kings viii. 22, 64; ix. 25; 2 Kings xi. 4—15)." But to whatever class these men belonged, they were offering provocation to God by worshipping the sun. This form of idolatry was of very ancient origin. Job declares his innocence of it (Job xxxi. 26). It is distinctly prohibited in the Law given by Moses (Deut. xvii. 3). In its earliest form, among the Arabians, the worship was addressed directly to the heavenly bodies, without the intervention of images. In times preceding those of the prophet this idolatry had been introduced into Jerusalem, and abolished by King Josiah (2 Kings xxiii. 5, 11). But by some means it had been revived or reintroduced, and now in the days of Ezekiel was openly flourishing again. Moreover, their worship of the sun was aggravated by the posture in which it was practised. "With their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east." The sanctuary of the Lord God was behind them, as a thing they were renouncing, while they were looking to the new object of their hope and adoration rising in the east. A still further aggravation of their sin is mentioned: "And, lo, they put the branch to their nose." We are not certain as to the meaning of this expression. But the opinion of Hengstenberg seems to us the most probable: "The Persian sun-worshipper, according to Strabo and others, held in his hand a bunch of shoots, called barsom, when praying to the sun, and applied it to the mouth when uttering prayer. This quite agrees with the rite here." And Professor Cheyne says of this rite, "It appears to be of Persian origin; only this qualification must be made that, considered as a Persian practice, it has reference not to the worship of the sun, but to that of the sacred fire. In the Avesta we read of a bundle of branches called *baresma* (later writings call it *barsom*), which occupied as important a place in Zoroastrian worship as in the worship of these 'five and twenty men.' The twigs preferred for this sacred object were those of the date, the pomegranate, and the tamarisk, and the words of the Zoroastrian Scripture (Vendidad, xix. 64) are rendered as follows by the latest translator: 'Let the faithful man cut off a twig of baresma, long as a ploughshare, thick as a barleycorn. The faithful one, holding it in his left hand, shall not leave off keeping his eyes upon it.' Thus it is not expressly stated by the Zoroastrian authorities (nor yet is it by Strabo) that the *baresma* was to be held to the mouth (or the nose). This, however, was the way of holding the veil called *paitidâna*, the object of which was to prevent the impurities of the breath from passing into the sacred fire. Professor Monier Williams informs me that this at least is still in use among the Parsee priests." By this heathenish and idolatrous practice the Lord Jehovah was insulted by his own people. 3. *The social injustice and oppression.* "They have filled the land with violence." Unfaithfulness to God and cruelty to man were sins that went hand-in-hand amongst the people of Israel (cf. ch. vii. 23; ix. 9). "State oppression and Church corruption go together," says Greenhill; "in the temple were pollutions, and in the land violence. The princes and judges, they wronged men; the priests and prophets, they wronged God (Zeph. iii. 3, 4). . . . If there be violence in a land, there will be corruptions, pollutions, abominations in the sanctuary; if there be superstition, idolatry in the Church-state, there will be oppression, injustice, and spoil in the civil-state: when the temple is a den of thieves, the land will be a den of oppressors and murderers (Jer. vii. 9—11)." Thus the people provoked the Lord to anger by their oft-repeated and much-aggravated sins and crimes.

II. GOD'S PUNISHMENT OF MAN. "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare," etc. (ver. 18). The nature of the punishment is not stated here; but it has already been set forth at length by the prophet, and is still further indicated in the next two chapters. Two remarks concerning it are suggested by this verse. 1. *It will be the expression of his righteous anger.* "Therefore will I also deal in fury." The "therefore" indicates the close connection between the sin and the punishment. They are related as cause and effect (see our remarks on ch. vii. 4). 2. *It will be inflicted without any relenting.* "Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them." The former of these clauses we noticed on its occurrence in ch. vii. 4. And as to the loud cries of the wicked in their distress, they are generally the mere outburst of selfishness, without a particle of true penitence or prayer (cf. Prov. i. 24—31). "When Nebuchadnezzar came, besieged the city: when plague and famine increased, then they fell upon their knees and cried to God for help; as malefactors, when the judge is ready to give sentence, cry out, and importune him to spare their lives. Such prayers are the voice of the flesh, not of the spirit: forced, not free: faithless and unseasonable prayers, coming too late, and therefore unacceptable. Let men therefore not defer seeking of

God till necessity puts them upon it" (Greenhill). And let us seek him, not with the selfish cries of terror, but with penitent and believing hearts. "It is not the loud voice, but the upright heart, that God will regard."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER IX.

Ver. 1.—He cried, etc. The voice comes, as before, from the human form, seen as a theophany, in the midst of the Divine glory. **Cause them that have charge over the city.** The noun is an abstract plural, commonly rendered "visitation" (Isa. x. 3; Jer. xi. 23, and elsewhere). Here, however, it clearly stands for persons (just as we use "the watch" for "the watchmen"), and is so used in Isa. lx. 17; 2 Kings xi. 18 (comp. ch. xliv. 11). The persons addressed are called "men," but they are clearly thought of as superhuman; like the angels who came to Sodom (Gen. xix. 1); like the angel with the drawn sword in 2 Sam. xxiv. 16; 1 Chron. xxi. 16. **His destroying weapon.** The word clearly implies something different from a sword, but corresponds in its vagueness to the Hebrew. In ver. 2 the Hebrew for "slaughter-weapon" implies an instrument for crashing into fragments, probably an axe or mace. A cognate word in Jer. li. 20 is translated "battle-axe," and the LXX. gives that meaning here, as also does the margin of the Revised Version.

Ver. 2.—Behold, six men, etc. The man clothed with linen brings the number up to the sacred number seven, as in Zech. iv. 10; Rev. i. 16, 20; xv. 6. He is over them rather than among them, and answers to the scribe who appears so frequently in Assyrian sculptures, as the secretary who counts the prisoners that have been taken in battle. They come from the north, the region from which the vision of ch. i. 4 had come, in which, in the nearer vision of ch. viii. 4, the prophet had seen the same glorious presence. They appear, *i.e.*, as issuing from the Divine presence to do their work of judgment. Possibly, as in Jer. i., there may be an allusive reference to the fact that the Chaldeans, as the actual instruments of their judgment, came from the same region. The gate in question was built by Jotham (2 Kings xv. 35). The captain of the band is arrayed in the "white linen" of the hosts of heaven and of the priests on earth (ποδήρης in the LXX.; comp. Lev. vi. 10; xvi. 4; ch. xliv. 17; Dan. x. 5; xii. 6). **A writer's inkhorn.** Through all the changes of Eastern life this has been the outward sign of the scribe's office. Here it is obviously connected with the oft-recurring thought of the books of life and death in the chancery of heaven (Exod. xxxii. 32; Ps. lxix. 28; cxxxix. 16; Isa. iv. 3; Dan. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 3). It was to be the work of this scribe (ver. 4) to mark such as were for death to death, such as were for life to life. The LXX., misunderstanding the Hebrew, or following a different text, gives, not "a writer's ink-horn," but "a girdle of sapphire." With all the precision of one who knew every inch of the temple courts, the priest-prophet sees the visitants take their station beside the brazen altar, probably, as they came from the north, on the north side of it.

Ver. 3.—Was gone up; better, *went up*. The prophet saw the process as well as the result. The "glory of the Lord" which he had seen (ch. viii. 4) by the northern gate rose from its cherub-throne (we note the use of the singular to express the unity of the fourfold form), as if to direct the action of his ministers, to the threshold of the "house." This may be connected also with the thought that the normal abiding-place of the presence of the Lord had been "between the cherubim" (Ps. lxxx. 1) of the mercy-seat, but that thought seems in the present instance to be in the background, and I adopt the former interpretation as preferable.

Ver. 4.—Set a mark upon the foreheads, etc. The command reminds us of that given to the destroying angel in Exod. xii. 13, and has its earlier and later analogues in the mark set upon Cain (Gen. iv. 15), and in the "sealing" of the servants of God in Rev. vii. 3. Here, as in the last example, the mark is set, not on the lintels of the doorposts, but upon the "foreheads" of the men. And the mark is the letter *tau*, in old Hebrew, that of a cross +, and like the "mark" of mediæval and (in the case of the illiterate) of modern usage, seems to have been used as a signature, and is rightly so translated in the Revised Version of Job xxxi. 35. Jewish writers have accounted for its being thus used, either (1) from its being the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and thus denoting completeness, or (2) from its being the first letter of the word *thorah* (Law); or (3) from its standing in the same position in the Hebrew word for "thou shalt live." Christian writers (Origen, *in loc.*; Tertullian, 'Adv. Marcion,' iii. 22) have not unnaturally seen in it a quasi-prophetic reference to the sign of the cross as used by Christians, and it is possible that the use of that sign in baptism may have originated in this passage. That was to be the sign of the elect of God in the midst of a world lying in wickedness. Possibly in older as in later forms of idolatry (as *e.g.* in the cultus of Mithras, Vishnu, Schiva), the votaries of this or that deity may have been distinguished by some outward note of this kind; but of this, though suggested by Currey, I do not find any evidence. It is clear, however, that there could be no anticipation of the Christian symbolism in the minds of Ezekiel or of his hearers. The "mark" was to be placed on all who were still faithful to the worship of their fathers, though they could show their faithfulness only by lamentation of the national apostasy. Such, of course, were Jeremiah, and Baruch, and Ahikam, and Shaphan, and Gedaliah, and others, and such as these Ezekiel may have had present in his thoughts. Against all others (ver. 5) they were sent forth with unsparing severity.

Ver. 6.—**Begin at my sanctuary, etc.** It was fitting that the spot in which guilt had culminated should be the starting-point of punishment. There seems something like a reference to this command in 1 Pet. iv. 17. In each case judgment "begins at the house of God." So the dread work began with the ancient men, or *elders*, of the same class, *i.e.*, if not the same persons, as those in ch. viii. 11.

Ver. 7.—**Defile the house, etc.** What Ezekiel saw in vision was, we may well believe, fulfilled literally when the city was taken by the Chaldeans. The pollution of the temple by the bleeding corpses of the idolatrous worshippers was a fitting retribution for the worship with which they had polluted it (comp. ch. vi. 13).

Ver. 8.—**I fell upon my face, etc.** The ministers of vengeance and the prophet were left in the courts of the temple alone. His human, national sympathies led him, as they led Moses (Numb. xi. 2; xiv. 19) and St. Paul (Rom. ix. 1—3) to undertake the work of intercession. With the words which had been the key-note of Isaiah's prophecies, probably present to his thoughts (Isa. xxxvii. 32, *et al.*), he asks whether Jehovah will indeed destroy all that *remnant* of Israel (comp. ch. xi. 13) who might be as the germ of hope for the future.

Ver. 9.—**Then said he unto me.** The answer holds out but little comfort. The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah (we note the coupling of the names, though Judah only was the immediate subject of the vision, as if his prayer had gone up for the whole body of the twelve tribes) was immeasurably great. Not idolatry only, but its natural fruits, bloodshed and oppression, had eaten into the life of the nation (comp. ch. vii. 11, 12; viii. 17; xxii. 25). And these evils had their root in the practical atheism of the denials which had been already uttered in ch. viii. 12, and which are here reproduced. The unpitying aspect of God's judgments is, for the present, dominant, and the work must be thorough. One notes how the despair of the prophet leads him to forget those who were to have the mark upon their foreheads, who were indeed the true "remnant." Like Elijah, he does not know of any such (1 Kings xix. 10); like Jeremiah, he searches through the streets of Jerusalem, and cannot find one righteous man (Jer. v. 1).

Ver. 11.—**And, behold, etc.** The speaker in the previous verses had been none other than the Presence which remained upon the cherubic form, while the seven ministers did their work. The captain of the seven now returns to report, as an officer to his king, that the work has been accomplished.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*A writer's ink-horn.* Here was a singular contrast. When Jerusalem was about to be given over to slaughter, six armed men went forth for the work of destruction, their accoutrements and military bearing quite in harmony with the dread circumstances of the day; but accompanied by a most incongruous companion, a civilian, one of the city clerks, perhaps, with no better ammunition than an ink-horn. When, however, the work of this man of ink is apparent, his function is seen to be of supreme importance in regard to the events of the day; for he it is who is to set a mark on the foreheads of the penitent, which is to save them from the otherwise indiscriminate slaughter.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF THE INK-HORN. Writing was but slenderly used in those early days; yet even then the pen was known and used. Since that distant age how greatly has its power extended! It is now *par excellence* the tool and weapon of civilized society. From the ink-horn go forth influences that encircle the globe and endure to many generations. The writer at his desk uses his magic fluid as an *elixir vitæ* for ideas which would otherwise be still-born and be speedily buried in oblivion. By means of this potent agency he is able to give body and endurance to the fleeting fancies of the hour. The greatest truths are thus preserved and transmitted. If there had been no ink-horn, we should have had no Bible. Civilization has grown up on the food of literature. The sword destroys; the pen creates. When the work of the warrior is lost in the wreck of ages, the work of the writer still endures. The victories of Nebuchadnezzar have left not a shadow behind them; but the Psalms of David are more powerful to-day than when the sweet singer of Israel first chanted them to his shepherd's harp.

II. THE MISSION OF THE INK-HORN. This fearful power of writing may be put to hurtful or frivolous uses. It may disseminate poisonous ideas. Bad literature is worse than the plague. In private life the pen may record scandal that had better have been forgotten; it may write spiteful words that will rankle in the mind of the reader who peruses them long years after the heedless writer has forgotten that he ever committed the folly of putting them to paper. The power of the pen is a warning to the humblest writer to beware of what he sets down. But there is a noble use of this power. The man with the ink-horn in Ezekiel's vision was to mark the penitent, and so to secure their being passed over in the great slaughter by the men of the sword. It is nobler to save than to destroy. The arts of peace are better than the science of war. Pure literature should be a saving and protecting influence. They who have the thoughts of God written on their minds and hearts may be said to be marked against the advent of the destroyer. All who have the gift or the vocation of writing are called to a career which *should* be one of help to their fellow-men. The literary man is tempted to be indolent and selfish, to dream his life away without coming into contact with the misery of his fellow-men, and without doing much to alleviate that misery. Ezekiel's man of the ink-horn, however, is to leave his desk and walk through the streets. He is to use his ink to save his fellows. When a city is perishing it is no time to write idle sonnets.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INK-HORN. The man with the ink-horn was required to give an account of his use of it (see ver. 11). This is a talent which the great Master expects to be used for his glory. Abuse of it is sin. Now, there are special temptations to such an abuse. 1. *The love of fame.* This leads to writing what will be admired rather than what is good and true. 2. *The greed of money.* The gift of writing is prostituted to a shameful use when a man writes for pay contrary to his conscience and his convictions. 3. *The sense of power.* A writer is tempted to set down striking words, even if they should not be quite true, or though, perhaps, they should needlessly pain some fellow-man. Smartness is often cruel. Writing, like every other act of life, needs to be consecrated to Christ and executed for his glory.

Ver. 4.—*The mark upon the forehead.* I. THE PENITENT ARE TO HAVE A MARK UPON THEIR FOREHEADS. "The men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations" are to be marked on the forehead by the man with the ink-horn. God looks for confession of sin and repentance. He does not expect primitive innocence, because we have all lost that fair grace of Eden; but he desires to see our admission of guilt and our sorrow for sin. The penitent publican is accepted (Luke xviii. 13). The woman who washed Christ's feet with her tears is forgiven (Luke vii. 37—48). Such a condition involves certain experiences. 1. *A recognition of the fact of guilt.* We are often just blind to sin. It is one great step gained when we abandon excuses and admit the charges God has against us. 2. *A sense of sorrow for sin.* These men "sigh." It is worse to admit guilt and to pride ourselves in it, or regard it with indifference, making light of sin, than to be ignorant of its enormity. 3. *A public confession.* These men "cry." They are known among their companions as penitents. Such are the men whom God marks.

II. THE PENITENT ARE TO BE SAVED BY THE MARK ON THEIR FOREHEADS. When the slayers go about with their swords they are to spare all who have the mark. The use of this ink-mark on the forehead is like the use of the blood smeared on the doorposts of the Hebrews on the night when the destroying angel went about to slay the firstborn of Egypt. God does not punish indiscriminately. In the midst of wrath he remembers mercy. There is a way of escape from Divine vengeance. When we repent of our sin he is ready to forgive and save. 1. *The mark is set by a Divine command.* The penitent do not mark themselves, nor do they mark one another.

There may be wolves in sheep's clothing in Christ's flock. The seeming penitent may be a hypocrite; but "the Lord knoweth them that are his." 2. *The mark is conspicuous.* "On the forehead," not on some hidden part of the body. There can be no mistake about it. Men may be disowned by their brethren, but God will not forget his own.

III. THE MARK OF THE PENITENT IS TYPICAL OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST. This whole scene is visionary. We may find in it illustrations of more than the people of the time guessed, or even the prophet himself dreamed. According to the best interpretation of the text, the mark seems to have been a cross. The penitent had the sign of the *cross* drawn in ink upon their foreheads. In Egypt the Hebrews sprinkled *blood* on their door-posts. Look at these two symbols—a cross; sprinkled blood! Both are for the same object—to secure deliverance. Surely we have here, at least, most apt illustrations of the Christian redemption. No mere ink-mark of the cross, nor sacramental wine, can effect spiritual deliverance. But the cross and blood of Christ, *i.e.* the giving of his life for us and to us, secure our salvation. We must see to it, however, that this cross, this "mark of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. vi. 17), is on each one of us individually.

Ver. 6.—*Beginning at the sanctuary.* The apostles, when entering on their missionary labours, were to "begin at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv. 47). The destroying messengers were to begin their direful work at the sanctuary.

I. THERE IS NO PROTECTION IN THE SANCTUARY. Some might flee to the holy shrine as to an asylum. This was done at heathen temples, and later at Christian churches, and no doubt in rude, violent ages, the pause of vengeance which such places afforded, like the use of the "cities of refuge" for the innocent manslayer, would then serve the purpose of justice. But this would be needless with God, because he is never hasty nor unjust, but slow to anger, and only taking just vengeance. Moreover, the asylum can never be a permanent protection for the guilty, and Ezekiel's Jews at the temple are guilty. 1. *No holy place can secure us against God's wrath.* We are not saved by attending church. The bad man who dies at church will go to the same fate that would have awaited him if he had dropped dead in his familiar haunts of debauchery. 2. *No holy office will secure us without holy living.* They who minister at the altar are not spared because of their sacred function. Priests share the doom of laity. Dante and Michael Angelo locate bishops in hell. The cardinal's hat appears in Fra Angelico's picture of the prison of lost souls. We shall not escape the punishment of our sins by putting on clerical vestments.

II. THE GREATEST GUILT IS FOUND IN THE SANCTUARY. No doubt the punishment was to begin there because the worst sin was practised in that place. The previous chapter gives an account of the abominations of the "chambers of imagery" in the temple. Many things concur to make the sins of the sanctuary great. 1. *They are sins committed against light.* The sins of Christians are worse than the same deeds done by the heathen, because Christians know the evil of them. People brought up under religious influences have not the excuse which may be pleaded for the poor waifs and strays of the streets. 2. *They are sins committed by men who profess better things.* Hypocrisy is thus added to the guilt of the offences themselves. 3. *They are stumbling-blocks to others.* Where a good example is looked for, people see the shame of a hypocritical pretence. This is enough to destroy all faith in religion. 4. *They are dishonouring to God.* The holy place is desecrated. Where God should be most honoured his Name is most outraged.

III. THE DOOM OF THE SANCTUARY IS A WARNING TO THE WORLD. The beautiful temple of Solomon was burnt; Jerusalem itself was destroyed; the Jews were scattered. These things were done in part for our warning. They show that great guilt will surely bring great punishment. They make it evident that no favouritism will prevent God from punishing the guilty. The members of a Christian Church will have no immunity on account of their membership, nor will pious phrases condone impious deeds. The besom of destruction will make a thorough search of the most secret refuges when God does begin the dreadful work. Let us flee from the sanctuary to the Saviour.

Ver. 7.—*The temple defiled.* The Jews had a horror of death, and regarded a corpse with disgust as an unclean thing, the presence of which would defile the most holy place, and the touch of which would render unclean any person who came in contact with it. Therefore a massacre in the temple would defile that sanctuary in the eyes of the nation by filling it with scenes of death, and strewing its courts with abhorred dead bodies. The irony of such a conception lies in the fact that the aggravated abominations of idolatry and vice which brought down this fate on the doomed temple had not been regarded as any defilement. So it was when the Jews feared to enter Pilate's palace lest the consequent defilement should prevent them from eating the Passover, although the stain of murder on their consciences was not reckoned to be any impediment (John xviii. 28). Thus men strain out the gnat and swallow the camel.

I. SIN LEADS TO AN UNDUE PREFERENCE OF THE EXTERNAL TO THE INTERNAL. 1. *This is caused by the deadening influence of sin.* The once keen conscience is blunted, and the perception of real evil dulled, so that what should be regarded with loathing is tolerated with indifference. At the same time, the conventional standards by which questions of outward propriety are measured remain undiminished. The loss of the higher standards then gives these lower ones a fictitious supremacy. The fog which hides the eternal mountains of Divine righteousness magnifies the petty hillocks of human opinion. 2. *This is illustrated in all phases of experience.* Not only is more thought of external than of internal defilement in religion; external things generally take the lead. The punishment of a sin is more considered than the evil of the sin itself. Shame is treated as worse than guilt. The word "character" comes to be transferred from interior disposition to public reputation. A social stigma is dreaded, while undiscovered sin is harboured complacently.

II. REAL DEFILEMENT IS MORAL AND INTERNAL. It is those things which proceed out of a man that defile him (Matt. xv. 18), because they spring from the centre of all true evil, the heart of man. 1. *The sanctuary of worship is only defiled by the corrupt conduct of the worshippers.* Pompey could not really defile the sacred courts by trampling rudely over the holy ground. The true abomination of desolation was the sin of the Jews. A church is desecrated by worldliness and evil thoughts in the worshippers. 2. *The temple of the body is only defiled by unholy conduct.* It is a mere symbol of this defilement when contact with a corpse is thought to render the person unclean. Contact with sinful occupations is the real defilement. When this temple of the Holy Ghost is turned into a depository of evil, its glory departs. It is not the dead flesh of a corpse, but living carnality that defiles. When this rottenness is cut out no external defilement can hurt, for then "to the pure all things are pure."

III. THE PUNISHMENT OF INTERNAL DEFILEMENT IS OUTWARD SHAME. The Jews are to have the temple defiled in this external manner as a punishment for the previous moral degradation of it. In the end sin blossoms into shame. The commission of sin may be hidden, but the punishment of it will be public. In God's great day the secrets of all hearts will be revealed. Then hypocrisy will cease, and the external will be a true index to the internal. The defiled soul will be seen in a foul body; the corruption of heart will be punished by the degradation of all things that a man prizes. The only way of escape is by a previous confession of the soul-corruption, and the cleansing of the heart from its defilement through the grace of Christ (Ps. li. 7).

Ver. 10.—*The inexorable God.* We are so accustomed to dwell upon the forbearance, long-suffering, and merciful disposition of God, that the inexorable character of his righteousness is not sufficiently considered. There are conditions in which he cannot show mercy.

I. GOD WILL NOT SPARE THE IMPENITENT. He pardons on condition of repentance. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John i. 9). But if we will not humble ourselves to admit our guilt, nor cease to court and favour the things that God hates, it is simply impossible that he should regard us with complacency.

II. GOD WILL NOT SPARE ANY FAVOURED PERSONS. The perpetual fallacy of Israel lay in considering itself a privileged nation, sure of the favour of God in spite of its own unfaithfulness, instead of understanding that it stood under covenant relations with him which involved a loyal observance of certain conditions if the Divine blessings were to be received. Christians are in danger of flattering themselves with a similar delusion. God cast off his own people the Jews when they were faithless. God will cast off a faithless Church. Christians who break away from Christ will merit and will receive the "wrath of the Lamb." Those in highest positions in the Church will find no immunity. No excuses will be available for real guilt.

III. GOD WILL NOT SPARE ANY SIN. He means to destroy sin. If the sinner hold to it and identify his fate with it he must come under the destruction. If he cast it off as an alien, hateful, deadly thing—a viper that he has plucked from his bosom—God will destroy the sin. In the discipline of the Christian life God is always fighting against sin. He will not cease till he has killed the last of the vile brood of the serpent. Christ has come as the friend of the sinner, and *therefore* as the enemy of his sin. "He will throughly purge his floor," etc. (Matt. iii. 12).

IV. GOD WILL NOT SPARE ANY NEEDFUL CHASTISEMENT. It hurts the kind parent to have to chastise his son. Yet it would be an unkindness and a selfishness to spare himself the pain of inflicting wholesome punishment. The surgeon has a steadier hand than the soldier. His knife is more inexorable than the sword of war. The very fact that it cuts to heal makes it the more strong and certain. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" (Heb. xii. 6). Therefore the chastisement which love inspires is the more certain to fall.

V. GOD DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON. (Rom. viii. 32.) In the sacrifice of Christ God showed the firmness and strength of his love to us. A weak and soft love would not have gone to so great a cost. Even the tears of Gethsemane did not move the inexorable God, though, of course, this was really with the consent of Christ, who freely gave himself for us, and to whom therefore no wrong was done.

Ver. 11.—*The completed task.* A man with an ink-horn had been sent round Jerusalem to set a cross on the foreheads of all penitent persons, and so to mark them for protection against the terrible coming slaughter. This pleasant task had been performed, and the messenger now returned, saying, "I have done as thou hast commanded me." These words are a suitable motto for a completed task.

I. THE SERVANT OF GOD IS REQUIRED TO DO AS HIS MASTER COMMANDS HIM. He is not only required to serve, he is also required to obey; *i.e.* he is not merely to work for the benefit of his Master, he is to do what his Master wishes. Thus obedience is more than service; and it is harder of performance. 1. *He should have a single eye to his Master's will.* Possibly this may be contrary to his own inclinations, and even opposed to what he imagines would be most serviceable towards the end in view. Men may criticize, advise, mock, threaten. The servant of God must be ready to reply with St. Peter, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye," etc. (Acts iv. 19). The will of God—in the revelation of the Bible, the example of Christ, and a man's own conscience—is the one sole authority. With the enlightened liberty of Christianity this does not come as a blind law, but appealing to conviction. Yet still, when thus we know the right, there is an end of the matter. The servant of God is then like the famous Six Hundred. 2. *He has only to accomplish his Master's will.* The man with the ink-horn has simply to mark the penitent—not to rescue them, build a castle in which to hide them, fight on their behalf. The Christian soldier is to preach the gospel to every creature. The results he must leave with God. Moreover, each is just to do his own part, and not to distress himself because he cannot also do his neighbour's work. The terrible burden of the world would seem less if we realized our responsibility as lying just in obedience.

II. THE JOY OF THE SERVANT OF GOD IS IN ACCOMPLISHING THE TASK HIS MASTER LAYS UPON HIM. God does not put upon his servants harder work than they can perform by his aid. Now we have to face our tasks, and perhaps they appear toilsome and formidable. It will be a most happy thing to be able to look back upon them as accomplished. Not, indeed, that any one perfectly fulfils the Master's commands. Christ alone could cry, in the fullest sense of the words, "It is finished!" (John xix. 30). Yet St. Paul could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. iv. 7). And Christ will welcome his true steward with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. xxv. 23). 1. *There is the joy of accomplishment.* The task of a Sisyphus is one of the tortures of Tartarus. The aimlessness of the walk of the treadmill gives the sting to the convict's punishment.

There is a joy in accomplishment. Each stage passed, each height climbed, each task done, brings its own joy—a joy of which the indolent can have no conception. The true servant will say—

"And I will ask for no reward,
Except to serve thee still."

2. *There is the joy of the Master's approval.* Christ makes obedience the condition of his friendship (John xv. 14).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—*The mark of spiritual concern.* The defection and idolatry already described in the previous chapter could neither be disregarded nor unavenged. A nation that had enjoyed privileges so conspicuously great as Israel, and that had, in spite of all such privileges, apostatized from the God to whom they owed everything that distinguished them from the surrounding nations, had written its own sentence of condemnation. But the Divine retribution is never undiscriminating. The laws of national life are such that the righteous are often slain with the wicked; but their calamity is not a sign of Divine displeasure. And above this earth, upon which anomalies are ever witnessed—anomalies calling for both submission and faith—there is a region where perfect discrimination is ever exhibited. This passage teaches a precious lesson. The Judge of all the earth will do right; he will separate the wheat from the chaff. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." They bear his own mark, the impress of his own seal. They shall be delivered in the judgment that shall overtake the disobedient and rebellious. The Divine Priest of salvation himself gives the direction, "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark!"

I. THE PREVALENCE OF MORAL ABOMINATIONS IN A COMMUNITY. The various idolatries that had been brought into Jerusalem had led the population of that city into error and sin. Even in the neighbourhood and the precincts of the temple itself the worship and the practices of the heathen prevailed unchecked. A holy God, and commandments righteous and pure, were forsaken for deities and for rites which were the expression of human degradation and corruption. Where is the community in which there is nothing parallel to the state of things at Jerusalem in the time of Ezekiel? Wealth, luxury, pleasure, a worldly standard of judgment and of life, are too often substituted for the lofty and exacting religion of the Lord Jesus Christ. With irreligion come vice and crime in varying forms. Abominations are wrought in every great city in Christendom at which angels may weep.

II. THE RETRIBUTIVE JUDGMENT OF GOD. The six men with the battle-axes, whom the prophet saw in his vision, were directed to execute a righteous sentence upon the inhabitants of the city; they were without pity to slay the sinful and rebellious of every age and every class. There is something awful in the resolve of the Lord, as recorded by the prophet, "I will recompense their way upon their head." No one who has studied the history of the nations of the earth will question the action of a retributive Providence. In the facts which meet us there is indeed much that perplexes us; but we are not left in doubt as to the fate of the selfish, the worldly, the unjust, the cruel, the voluptuous, in a word, the idolatrous, those who forget and forsake God. However it may be hereafter, there is no room for questioning how it is in this world with those who rebel against God.

III. THE INDIFFERENCE WITH WHICH PREVAILING INIQUITY IS TOO GENERALLY REGARDED. Such indifference is sometimes justified by argument: as when men say that the world's sin is fated and inevitable, and that it is needless and useless to trouble ourselves concerning it. But generally this is merely a sign of selfishness and hardness of heart. Men shut their eyes and deafen their ears to the evidences of prevailing sin; to recognize it would disagreeably disturb them in their pursuits, their pleasures, their dreams.

IV. THE SUFFERING AND DISTRESS OCCASIONED TO THE TRUE PEOPLE OF GOD BY THE SPECTACLE OF ABOUNDING INIQUITY. There are those, thank God, in every community of professed Christians who are not unaffected by the abominations which are done. They mark their sense of prevailing sin by their protests and rebukes, by their confessions and prayers, by their practical efforts for the improvement of their fellow-men, and especially by their zeal in the proclamation of the gospel and in the furtherance of all means employed to bring before the minds of sinners the character, the ministry, the redeeming work of him who came "to seek and to save that which was lost."

V. THIS SPIRITUAL CONCERN A MARK OF GOD'S SPECIAL FAVOUR, AND A SIGN OF FUTURE SALVATION. It was a common practice, and indeed still is, in the East, to set a mark upon the forehead of the deity worshipped, and upon the forehead of the worshipper. The practice is alluded to in other passages besides this in Ezekiel. The priest and intercessor placed the sign upon those who sighed and cried because of the abominations; and they were exempted from the general calamities and destruction. In this provision is a great spiritual truth. We should commit a mistake did we understand an outward and visible sign merely. This may be present or absent. It is the Lord's own prerogative to mark his own people, to recognize their earnest spiritual concern, to assure them of his own favour and approval as partaking the sentiments, if it may so be expressed with reverence, of his own nature, and to secure them for the coming tribulation, to hide them as in the cleft of the rock, and to enrich them with the blessings of eternal salvation. There is no truer mark of the Divine Spirit than sorrow for prevalent sin, and solicitude for the cause of truth and righteousness.—T.

Ver. 6.—"*Begin at the sanctuary!*" The vision which Ezekiel saw, and which brought vividly before his mind the moral state of his country's metropolis, contained no feature more painful than the representation of the idolatry prevailing in the very precincts of the temple itself. He saw twenty-five men, apparently representing the priesthood, turning their backs towards the temple of the Lord, and their faces towards the east, and worshipping the rising sun. Upon these, as the most flagrant and inexcusable offenders, the righteous retribution first fell. Those most highly privileged are by that very fact most evidently responsible; and unfaithfulness upon their part deserves and will receive sorer condemnation.

I. THOSE SPECIALLY EMPLOYED IN RELIGIOUS SERVICES ARE SPECIALLY BOUND TO WATCHFULNESS, SENSITIVENESS, AND ACTIVITY IN THE PRESENCE OF MORAL ABOMINATIONS. A profession of religion, much more occupation in the minstrations of religion, imposes a peculiar responsibility; for religion is essentially in antagonism to error, to superstition, and to vice. Yet there have been periods in which ministers even of the true religion have been lax in their own conduct, and have connived at prevailing error. There is an obligation on the part of every one who, by reason of office, employment, and public position, is a representative of Christianity, to aim at the prevalence of Christian principles throughout the community.

II. THOSE WHO, BEING PROFESSEDLY MINISTERS OF RELIGION, ARE YET NEGLIGENT AND INDIFFERENT IN THE PRESENCE OF FLAGRANT SIN, ARE IN A SPECIAL MANNER OBJECTS OF DIVINE DISPLEASURE. It is not only in privilege and blessing that the sanctuary takes precedence. Unfaithfulness there is observed and reprehended as sin of the first magnitude. Retribution begins at the sanctuary. How should they be clean who bear the vessels of the Lord! God is indeed forbearing towards the failings and infirmities of his true servants. But the insincere and hypocritical are the objects of Divine aversion; those of such character who occupy positions of prominence and influence are regarded as abusing their position and as forfeiting all claim to confidence.

III. THE UNFAITHFUL IN THE SANCTUARY ARE THE FIRST TO FEEL THE NATION'S CHASTISEMENT. There is a well-known proverb, "Like priest, like people." A corrupt clergy encourages national degeneration. And when such degeneration issues in national calamity and destruction, it is but just that those who have fostered evil principles should be the first to suffer. This has happened again and again in the world's history. Those who should have led the people aright, who should have enjoyed the people's confidence and esteem, have too often been the agents in their deterioration; and when the time of trial has come, they have lost their influence, forfeited the position they abused, and paid for their unfaithfulness with the ruin of their reputation, and even with the loss of their life. The destruction which has involved a nation has begun at the sanctuary.—T.

Ver. 11.—*True obedience.* The very word "obedience" is to some minds offensive and repulsive. Association may connect it with tyranny, and then it suggests harshness and severity on the one side, and merely compulsory submission on the other. But to the right-minded no word is more welcome, for no moral quality is more honourable. The son obeys the wishes of his father; the soldier, the sailor, render immediate obedience to the word of command; to the school-boy who is worthy of his advantages, his master's will is law; the ambassador lives to carry out the instructions of the court by which he is commissioned. In fact, all through human life, especially in civilized and Christian communities, command and obedience are universal principles, binding society together. In the text we have an example of obedience rendered by one of his servants to the most high God; the profession of obedience here made is distinguished by remarkable simplicity and dignity.

I. Religious obedience is based upon personal relations. There is natural law, which, in a certain sense, we may be said to obey, but with no voluntary adoption or choice. Being, so far as the body is concerned, subject to physical law, we are to that extent obedient without the moral quality and virtue of obedience. But law in its proper sense is the imposition of the will of a superior upon that of an inferior. Law of this kind is not always just, is not always deserving of reverence. The despot commands, and his trembling subject may obey; the slave-driver commands, and the slave may from fear render unquestioning obedience. But, on the other hand, there are human relations which involve wise directions and willing compliance. And such are, in a sense, the copy of that beneficent relation which subsists between the Creator and his subject man. Mind comes into contact with mind. "*I* have done as *thou* hast commanded *me*." The language brings the personalities into closest contact. The obedient is impelled, not by regard for his interests or by fears lest he suffer, but by the recognition of the personal right of God. It is always well, in the religious life, to look through the Law to the Lawgiver, through the decision to the Judge, through the fatherly word to the Father himself.

II. Religious obedience involves authority and subjection. Authority is not, as has sometimes been taught, an invention of human ingenuity for the promotion of human convenience. In its essence it is Divine. It is something quite different from power, and something far higher. In human nature and in human society, authority is sometimes unaccompanied by power; force even usurps its proper place. Human beings are fallible in wisdom and imperfect in goodness; and it often happens that the exercise of authority is unjust and hateful. But the authority of God is always exercised with wisdom and with justice. Obedience to man is always a qualified, whilst obedience to God is an absolute, duty. The Divine will is indeed binding, and for this reason—that the Divine judgment is always supremely excellent. In fact, every command of God is the utterance of the Infinite Reason. There is moral authority in God's commands, which our judgment and conscience spontaneously acknowledge.

III. Religious obedience is motived and inspired by grateful love. There is much obedience rendered by man to man, merely upon compulsion, under the influence of fear. And there are those who, under similar motives, seek to serve God. Veneration for the Lawgiver, and admiration of commandments in themselves excellent and beautiful, constrain some men to devote themselves to a life of obedience. But the distinctively Christian obedience is that which is rendered from gratitude and affection to the Saviour. When his mission to earth is truly understood; when it is perceived that it was pity which led him to undertake the work of redemption; when not only his labours, but his sufferings and sacrifice, are pondered and appreciated;—then love may well enkindle love, and those for whom Christ died may well ask what they shall render for all the benefits they receive from and through him. Who would not do anything to evince loyalty, affection, and gratitude, to a Friend so self-sacrificing, a Saviour so compassionate? Our Lord Jesus himself relied upon these motives. He did indeed claim obedience as his right: "Why call ye me Master and Lord, and do not the things which I say?" But he also asked obedience as a proof of response to his friendship: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you;" "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

"'Tis love that makes our willing feet
In swift obedience move."

IV. Religious obedience overcomes natural repugnance to any course of action prescribed by Divine authority. We have an illustration of this in the context. The special vocation of the man with the ink-horn was to set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sighed and cried for all the abominations that were done; yet he seems also to have had charge of the officers of the city to whom was entrusted the awful task of punishment and destruction. The work of deliverance was agreeable and grateful; the work of chastisement and slaughter must have been painful and distressing. Yet in both directions the will of the rightful Lord and King was done; and the report was rendered of the fulfilment in all their completeness of the royal commands. It happens to us all now and again to be called to undertake some service from which we shrink, to which by our temperament and habits we are naturally averse. But obedience has to be rendered, not only when the commands given harmonize with our predilections, but when they are sorely opposed to our natural or acquired tastes and inclinations. But rightful orders must be obeyed. As in the case of the Six Hundred—

"Theirs not to reason why;
Theirs not to make reply:
Theirs but to do and die."

So in the case of many a child of God, many a soldier of Christ, orders are known to be issued upon Divine authority which can only be obeyed at the risk of wealth, or reputation, or life. But such considerations have to be dismissed. Once satisfied that the commandments are Divine, the subject renders, if not a happy, yet a willing obedience. It is not to be expected that, in this imperfect state of being, obedience should always be enjoyment, though the aim of every Christian should be to say, with his Master, "I delight to do thy will, O my God!"

V. Religious obedience yields satisfaction to the conscience. If pleasure does not always accompany and follow true service, approval will not fail. Upon the grave of a great philanthropist may be read these lines—

"He does well who does his best.
Brothers! I have done my best:
I am weary: let me rest."

There may be something of self-righteousness in these lines. Here is an epitaph, however, which may be placed over any faithful servant of Christ—

"Life's work well done;
Life's course well run;
Life's crown well won:
Now comes rest."

There is, however, no reflection upon a life of obedience to compare in grandeur and beauty with that recorded to have been uttered by our Lord himself, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." To have given up one's own will, to have accepted the will of Heaven, to have toiled and suffered as an obedient son and servant in God's cause,—this is the better part, which will endure the retrospect of life's closing hour.

VI. Religious obedience secures acceptance and reward from the Supreme Ruler himself. If rebellion is, in the sight of God, man's one great error and sin, obedience is, in his sight, above all things acceptable. Every man who is saved is indeed saved by grace; but all are judged by their works. The good pleasure of the King promotes to higher service as the reward of diligence and fidelity. And there can be no words so welcome at the last as these, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"—T.

Vers. 1—7.—*The hour of judgment.* As among men there are magistrates' sessions as well as the great assizes, so also God has seasons for the local administration of justice, as well as the final judgment. In fact, God is always upon his judicial seat, always meting out justice to the various orders of his creatures. If he ceased to judge, he would cease to rule.

I. MARK THE SUPREMACY OF GOD'S JUDICIAL VOICE. The last chapter finished with the declaration, "Though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them;" *this* chapter begins with the statement, "*He* cried in mine ears with a loud voice." 1. *The season for prayer was exhausted.* Examination of Israel's case had terminated. The verdict had passed, and nothing now remained but execution. Prayer on the part of the condemned, at this point, would be merely a selfish thing. It would bring no good. It would be out of harmony with God's plans and with righteous law. 2. *The voice of God subjugates and overpowers all other voices.* It is a voice of creation: "He spake, and it was done." It is a voice of life: "Awake thou that sleepest!" It is a voice of judicial destruction: "Depart, ye cursed, into outer darkness!" The voice that Ezekiel heard was a *loud* voice. The prophet could not question its reality nor mistake its utterance. It overcame the prophet's unwillingness to hear judgment pronounced. It drowned all dissentient voices. Nothing was heard save this. "The voice of the Lord shaketh the mountains."

II. GOD'S SERVANTS ARE FOUND AMONG ALL ORDERS OF CREATURES. This earth is not an isolated kingdom; it is a province of God's great realm. The persons here summoned to appear for the execution of Jehovah's will are, without doubt, angels, though to the prophet's vision they seemed in form like men. As we read of angels who are appointed the guardians of little children, so we learn that certain angels are ordained guardians of cities and nations. To Daniel the angel spake of "Michael, *your* prince"—"the great prince that standeth for the children of thy people." The history of the Hebrew people is full of instances in which the angels of God were despatched either for the rescue or for the destruction of men. The Most High is unchangeable; and inasmuch as a destroying angel had executed God's vengeance on the idolaters of Egypt, so now angels are employed to slay the idolaters in Israel. Yet there is singular economy in all God's arrangements. The number of these officers of justice was six, so that one might issue from each of the six gates of the city. The ministers of vengeance shall neither be too many nor too few. Eventually the Chaldean armies should be God's agents in the punishment of the Hebrews; still, *these* would act under the generalship of the heavenly principalities and powers.

III. THE WORK OF JUSTICE PROCEEDS SIDE BY SIDE WITH THAT OF MERCY. Along with the six officers appointed to destroy was one differently clad, whose work was to save. His clothing was the attire of peace—white linen—*i.e.* the dress of a *true* priest. Against six destroyers there was one protector, which denoted how few was the number of the faithful. They were to have a distinguishing mark in the most conspicuous place—in their foreheads. The owner of the flock will take care to put his own sign-manual on his sheep. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." In every time of trouble "he has hidden them in his pavilion—in the secret of his tabernacle will he hide them." Noah and his family in the ark; Lot and his daughters in Zoar; the early Christians safe in Pella when Jerusalem was destroyed;—*these* are evidences of God's special care of his chosen. He accounts them his jewels, and in times of danger holds them in the hollow of his hand. Not only had they not connived at the idolatry, but their souls were distressed on account of it. They had besought with tears their brethren to desist from the evil thing. Their holy zeal shall have a conspicuous reward.

IV. GOD'S SERVANTS HAVE LIKE DISPOSITIONS WITH HIMSELF. God had described the emotions and purposes of his mind thus: "Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity." And now he requires his officers to cherish the selfsame sentiments: "Let not *your* eye spare, neither have *ye* pity." To be a servant of God, and the executioner of his will, we must be like-minded with himself. Only such does God employ on work of high importance. Eye and heart must be as God's. Following the tendencies of natural temperament, *some* servants of God would be too lenient, *some* too harsh. In such matters we must be sure that we are doing God's will, not indulging our own. Private spleen, and merely natural bias, must be completely repressed. Our feeling and temper and will must be chastened by almighty grace, in order that we may be the servants of God. *His* will must find a full response in our will.

V. Retribution is equitable and complete. There is no miscarriage of justice in God's court, and in his retributions there is no excess. The *equity* of the destruction is seen in that it begins at the sanctuary. The ringleaders in rebellion shall be foremost in the punishment. *That* sacred place is sacred no longer. God has withdrawn his presence; therefore all privilege is extinguished. It *had* been a sanctuary for the oppressed, for the unfortunate, for the fugitive in war; but it shall be no refuge for rebels defiant against God—no refuge for sin. Mere sentiment about the traditional sacredness of the place must yield to sterner virtues—must yield to practical and primitive righteousness. Better that every sanctuary of religion be defiled with bloodshed, than that they be nests of immorality, cesspools of vice! If the *reality be gone*, it is a common injury to maintain the *appearance*. And God's retributions will be complete. They will spare none. We may hesitate respecting the justice of destroying "little children;" yet we can repose confidently on the bosom of the eternal Father, and say, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" To *our* limited view the administration of supreme justice may sometimes be veiled in "clouds and darkness;" but we can afford to wait the fuller disclosures of the truth. "What we know not now, we shall know hereafter."—D.

Vers. 8—11.—*Human intercession.* In every age good men have felt an internal constraint to intercede for the guilty. Love to God always produces love to men.

I. Intercession for the guilty is praiseworthy. Ezekiel felt that, though surrounded by the slain, his own life had been spared. A proper sense of God's compassion to us awakens similar compassion for others. It is a noble sentiment, and God does not discourage it. It sheds a blessing in the breast of him who cherishes it. Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Paul, are notable examples of earnest intercessors for their fellows.

II. Intercession for the guilty should be made in great humility. Ezekiel "fell upon his face." This was most seemly. For, on the surface of our appeal, it would seem as if an imperfect man were more possessed with pity than is God. Yet this can never be. The tiny rill can never rise higher than the fount. *One* beam of light can never outvie the sun. Nor can we suppose that any element of extenuation has been overlooked by the comprehensive mind of God. In fact, reflection at such time is quiescent; the intercessor yields for the moment to the impulse of feeling. Nevertheless, intercession is proper and becoming; for who can tell but that God has predetermined to grant delay or reprieve on condition that intercession be made? We must stoop if we would conquer.

III. Intercession for the guilty must always be subordinate to the interests of righteousness. The prophet evidently had due regard to the honour of God, while he sought a reprieve for men. To blot out the very nation which he had aforetime so protected and blessed, would (in the eyes of the heathen) have been a dishonour. But the approval of the good among angels and among men was more precious, deserved more consideration, than the opinion of idolatrous nations. The well-being of the universe is intertwined with the maintenance of righteousness; and, at all costs, righteousness must be upheld. Already God had provided for the safety of the faithful few; but to the eye of the prophet the few seemed as nothing. Yet, if we had larger faith, we should have less anxiety for the Church's weal.

IV Intercession, though apparently unsuccessful, brings some advantage. Though Abraham, in pleading for Sodom, was *apparently* unsuccessful, he was not really so. No prayer is fruitless. God was not displeased with Ezekiel's intercession. He condescended to reason with him. He showed him yet more clearly the magnitude of Israel's sin. He showed him how that, if he did not destroy evil men, the evil men in Israel would slay the pious: "The land is full of blood." He impressed on the prophet's heart yet more deeply the sanctity of law and equity. The severest punishment was simply "recompense"—their proper wages. By such intercession the prophet is the better equipped for his future work.—D.

Vers. 1—7.—*Divine discrimination in the execution of judgment.* "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near," etc. In the preceding chapter the various forms of idolatry which were practised in Jerusalem, and by which the Lord Jehovah was provoked, were set forth; and now Ezekiel beholds in vision the treatment which God was about to deal out to the people by reason of their provocations. We observe—

I. THAT THE AGENTS OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS ARE EVER READY TO EXECUTE HIS COMMANDS. "He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand," etc. (vers. 1, 2). Instead of "Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near," Hengstenberg translates, "The visitations of the city draw near;" and Schröder, "Near are the visitations of the city." These six must be angels, heavenly watchers over the city; or, perhaps, as Bunsen says, "the punishing and destroying angels," who are now to execute the Divine retribution. They are spoken of as men, because they appeared in human form, in which form angels appeared unto Abraham (Gen. xviii. 2). That they were angels is evident also from the fact that they formed the retinue of the "man in their midst, clothed in linen," who is "no other than the angel of the Lord, and whom we never see accompanied with any other retinue than that of the lower angels; compare for example Zech. i. 11, etc., and Josh. v. 14, where the angel of the Lord designates himself as prince of the host of the Lord" (Hengstenberg). Many have been the conjectures as to the significance of the number of these angels. The true explanation seems to be that, with the angel of the Lord, they made the sacred number—seven (cf. Zech. iii. 9; Rev. v. 6). They were the executioners of the judgments of God upon the guilty inhabitants of the favoured city. And they were to execute it under the direction of "the man clothed in linen." For we have to regard him "not alone as appointed to the work of delivering the pious—not as standing in opposition to the six ministers of righteousness. The protection of the pious is his privilege; but the work of vengeance also stands under his control. The six are to be regarded as absolutely subordinate to him, executing the work of destruction only by his order and under his authority" (ibid.). After the execution of the judgment in this chapter, he said, "I have done as thou hast commanded me" (ver. 11). And in ch. x. 2, 7, he is expressly represented as the agent of the Most High in the burning of the city. Now, these angelic beings may be said to have been the agents, and the Chaldeans the instruments, in the work of slaughter. Soon as they were required for that work they were promptly at hand. And soon as they received their commands "they went forth, and slew in the city." Many are the agents and instruments which God employs; and when he summons them, they quickly respond to his call. When he commanded, the flood of waters overwhelmed the old world; and the flood of fire consumed the cities of the plain; and the earth yawned and engulfed the rebels against Moses and Aaron. In his judgments upon Egypt, frogs and flies, locusts and hail, were his ready instruments (cf. Ps. lxviii. 43—51; cxlviii. 8).

II. IN THE EXECUTION OF HIS JUDGMENTS GOD DISCRIMINATES BETWEEN THE TWO GREAT DIVISIONS OF MORAL CHARACTER. "And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's ink-horn by his side; and the Lord said unto him," etc. (vers. 4—6). Thus in this judgment certain persons were to be spared, while the rest were cut off; and provision was made for sparing them. How were they to be divided? Upon what principle was the awful separation to be made? 1. *The discrimination is in moral character.* There are those who represent the great division of men as a matter of Divine choice, altogether irrespective of human character or conduct. They say that men are elect or non-elect and reprobate solely because of the determinations of the Divine will. Certainly it is not so in this case. In the Divine estimation the essential division of men is *not material, social, or intellectual, but moral.* Mark the character here indicated of the men who are to be preserved: "The men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst" of the city. (1) Men who deeply grieved because of sin. They "sighed for all the abominations," etc. They did not participate in them, or regard them as trivial, or treat them with indifference; but were burdened by them, and mourned over them. Thus have holy men in all ages been afflicted by sin (cf. 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8; Ps. cxix. 53, 136, 158; cxxxix. 21; Jer. ix. 1; Ezra ix. 3). And thus our blessed Lord was deeply moved by the wickedness and woe of men (cf. Luke xiii. 34; xix. 41—44). (2) Men who gave expression to their grief because of sin. "That cry"—or groan—"for all the abominations," etc. Their sorrow found audible utterance. It was not concealed, but manifest. Their cries and groans indicated the oppression of their souls. "It argues strength of grace," says Greenhill, "to mourn for others' sins. Censuring and reproaching of others for their sins argues strength of corruption; and mourning for them argues strength of grace, a sound spiritual constitution. Such a one was in Christ; he prayed because of the hardness of others' hearts (Mark iii. 5)." Such are the characters who were to be spared in the great slaughter. 2. *The discrimination is made in infinite wisdom.* "And he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's ink-horn by his side," etc. (vers. 3, 4). Some think that the ink-horn was to be used for registering the names in the book of life, and making the mark upon the forehead. And as to the character of the mark, many contend that it was in the form of a cross. But the entire proceeding appears to be symbolical. We know that it took place in vision; and this marking upon the forehead was not to be an actual external thing, but it was a figurative setting forth of the truth that in the general slaughter certain persons would be safe, they would be guarded by the omniscient and omnipotent providence of God. Now, this discrimination was infallible. The man with the ink-horn is no other than he who "knew all men, and needed not that any one should testify of man; for he himself knew what was in man." His knowledge is infinite, both in its minuteness and in its comprehensiveness. And in the final judgment, which is committed unto him, there will be no mistake. To him every man's character will be manifest as if written upon his forehead; and he will read it with unerring accuracy. 3. *The discrimination leads to most momentous issues.* "And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite," etc. (vers. 5, 6). They who had the mark upon their foreheads were exempted from the awful judgments, while they who had it not were subject unto them. The signed ones were perfectly secure; the unsigned were ruthlessly slaughtered. But were the godly actually preserved in the siege and capture of the city? We know that Jeremiah, Ebed-melech, and Baruch were (Jer. xxxix. 16—18; xlv. 5). But looking at the question more broadly—Are the true and good exempted from the judgments which befall the wicked? In some instances they have been. Noah was saved when the ungodly world was drowned; Lot was rescued from the doomed cities of the plain; the Israelites escaped the plagues which fell upon the Egyptians; and ere the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans the Christians had escaped to the little town of Pella, in Peræa. But, to quote the words of Dr. Payson, "it will perhaps be said that many of the most bold and faithful servants of God and opposers of vice have suffered even unto blood, striving against sin. We grant it, but still it is true that the mark of God was upon them. It appeared in those Divine consolations which raised them far above suffering and the fear of death, and enabled them to rejoice and glory in tribulation. Did not Stephen exhibit this mark, when his murderers saw his face as it had been the face of an angel? Did not Paul and Silas display it, when at midnight their joy broke forth, in the hearing of their fellow-prisoners, in rapturous ascriptions of praise? Did not some of the martyrs display it, when they exclaimed in the flames, 'We feel no more pain than if reposing on a bed of roses'?" So far as the outward event is concerned, the righteous and the wicked have often been swept away in one common calamity; but wide has been the difference of their inward experiences in such calamities. Nothing befalls the godly but what they shall be sustained under, and it shall be overruled for their good. In the gracious providence of God "all things work together for good to them that love" him. "Who is he that will harm you if ye be zealous of that which is good?" It is eternally true that "righteousness tendeth to life; and he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." In the last great assize the wicked "shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life."

III. THAT THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD FALL FIRST UPON THOSE WHO HAVE PERVERTED THE RICHEST PRIVILEGES. "Slay utterly . . . and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house." The ancient men, or elders, are those mentioned in ch. viii. 16 as standing "with their faces toward the east," worshipping the sun. They had practised their idolatry nearest to the sanctuary of the Most High; and they were the first to be slain. As ancient men, elders, they occupied a position of honour and privilege, and should have used their influence to keep the people faithful to the Lord their God; but they had set an example of idolatry, and they were to be made the first example of judgment. "Begin at my sanctuary"—the place where the highest privileges had been neglected or perverted, where priests had proved treacherous to their trust, and where God was dishonoured. "To stand near the house of God is a blessed and also a safe position; but it is also the most dangerous position, if it is hypocrisy. Certainly in this case religion is no lightning-conductor, but what the tree is in the storm; those who are under it are sure to be struck dead" (Schröder).

CONCLUSION. 1. Let those who are eminent in position and privileges endeavour to be eminent also in principle and piety. 2. Let every one ask himself—Am I of the character of those who were spared in this stern judgment?—W. J.

Vers. 8—10.—*The intercession of the prophet and the answer of the Lord.* "And it came to pass, while they were slaying them, and I was left," etc. This intercession helps us to understand why the Lord showed to Ezekiel the secret abominations of the people, and called upon him to consider them (ch. viii. 7—12). In dealing with that vision, we suggested that he was called upon to consider it in order that he might be qualified to estimate correctly the righteousness of God's treatment of the wicked. To know the extent and enormity of their sins was necessary to enable him to acquiesce in the Divine judgments with which they were about to be visited. That necessity is made manifest by the fact that, now that the prophet beholds the execution of those judgments, he cries to God to abate their severity, and has to be reminded again of the many and heinous sins of the house of Israel and Judah. Consider—

1. THE AFFECTING INTERCESSION OF THE PROPHET. (Ver. 8.) In vision the work of slaughter in the temple is finished, and the angels of judgment have gone forth to slay in the city, leaving Ezekiel alone "in the court of the priests of the temple;" then he "fell upon his face, and cried, and said, Ah Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?" This intercession: 1. *Arose from deep feeling.* "I fell upon my face, and cried." Falling upon the face in prayer is indicative of great humiliation and grief, as may be seen from several examples (cf. Numb. xiv. 5; xvi. 4, 22; xx. 6; Josh. vii. 6). And our Lord, when his "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, . . . fell on his face, and prayed." So the soul of Ezekiel was intensely stirred as he beheld in vision the terrible slaughter of the sinful people. It may be a prophet's stern task to denounce the awful judgments of the Most High; but he will be deeply moved because of those judgments. The miseries of even the most guilty sinners will affect his heart with grief; and this feeling will lead him to intercede with God on behalf of the sinful and suffering people. Deep feeling prompts to earnest prayer. 2. *Presented an earnest appeal.* "Ah, Lord God! wilt thou destroy all the residue of Israel in thy pouring out of thy fury upon Jerusalem?" But had it not been shown unto Ezekiel that certain persons were to have a mark set upon their foreheads, and were to be spared in the general slaughter? "That his question is not hindered by his having heard of the pious being spared shows either his fear in this respect, that in Jerusalem there will be nothing at all to be spared, or that the sparing in comparison with the destruction does not at all come into consideration" (Schröder). Almost every word in this appeal is weighty. "Ah, Lord Jehovah! wilt *thou* destroy all the residue of Israel?" Thou who didst enter into covenant with them, and didst say, "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me;" wilt thou fail in thy promises, and break thy covenant? "Wilt thou *destroy* all the residue of Israel?" Thou didst say, "If his children forsake my Law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail;" and wilt thou now destroy them? Will it not suffice for thee to visit them with the sharp rod and with the searching stripes of thy chastisement? "Wilt thou destroy *all the residue of Israel?*" They have slain all that were in and about the temple, and have gone forth to slay in the city, and thou didst say unto me, "Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword" (ch. vi. 8); and wilt thou make an utter end, leaving no remnant, but slaying all? Thus earnestly and powerfully does the prophet appeal to the Lord on behalf of the doomed people.

II. The condescending answer of God to the prophet. (Vers. 9, 10.) The Lord graciously responds to the intercession of his servant; and in this response we have: 1. *A declaration of the great wickedness of the people.* (Ver. 9.) (1) Here are some forms of their wickedness. "The land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness:" or, as in the margin, "wresting of judgment." Cruelty and injustice abounded. They had "filled the land with violence" (ch. viii. 17). (2) Here is the root of their wickedness: "They say, The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not." (We have noticed these words in ch. viii. 12.) They were practically atheistic, denying the Divine interest in and observation of human life. "The source of all transgression," says Michaelis, "is the denial of the providence of God." 2. *A declaration of his determination to fully execute his judgments.* "And as for me also, mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity." (See our notes on these words in ch. vii. 4.) 3. *A declaration of the retributory character of his judgments.* "I will recompense their way upon their head." This relation of judgment and sin is more fully stated in ch. vii. 3, 4 (see our notes there). The Prophet Obadiah also declares this truth: "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head."

Conclusion. The answer of the Lord to the intercession of the prophet sheds encouraging light upon his treatment of our prayers to him. We learn that we have liberty of approach to him. We may talk with him of his judgments; and he will not resent it as if it were presumptuous on our part. We may rather rest assured that he will graciously respond to our appeals. He will reply even to our "wild and wandering cries" to him. But he will not always grant our requests either for ourselves or for others. He loves us too much and too wisely so to do.—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER X.

Vers. 1, 2.—Then I looked, etc. There follows on the work of judgment another theophany, like that of ch. i. 15—28. In the "expanse," or firmament, like the "terrible crystal," there is seen as before the likeness of a sapphire throne (see ch. i. 26, note). The form of the man who is the manifestation of Jehovah is implied, though not named. It is he who speaks to the captain of the six ministers of vengeance, himself the seventh, and bids him go in beneath the "whirling wheels" that are beneath the cherub (collective singular, as in ch. ix. 3), and fill his hands with coals of fire (ch. i. 13), and scatter them over the city, as the symbol of its doom. We are reminded of Isaiah's vision (Isa. vi. 6); but there the work of the fire was to purify, here simply to destroy.

Vers. 3, 4.—Now the cherubim stood, etc. The position of the cherubim is defined, with a vivid distinctness of detail, which once more reminds us of Dante. They had been standing on the right, *i.e.* the southern side of the sanctuary. What follows is probably a reproduction of the change of positions described in ch. ix. 3, and the verbs should be taken, therefore, as pluperfects. The cloud of glory, as in 1 Kings viii. 10, 11 and Isa. vi. 1, 2, the Shechinah, that was the token of the Divine presence, filled the court, but the glory itself had moved to the threshold at the first stage of its departure.

Vers. 5, 6.—And the sound of the cherubim. The use of God Almighty (*El Shaddai;* comp. Exod. vi. 3), the name of God as ruling over nature, while Jehovah expressed his covenant relationship to Israel, is, it may be noted, characteristic of the early stage of the religion of Israel (Gen. xvii. 1; xxviii. 3; xliii. 14; xlviii. 3). *Shaddai* alone appears eighty-one times in the Book of Job. Ps. xxix. explains the voice of *El Shaddai* (though there it is "the voice of Jehovah") as meaning the roar of the thunder. The hands of the "living creatures," now recognized as cherubim, had been mentioned in ch. i. 8, and it is one of those hands that gives the fire into the hands of the linen-vested minister of wrath. The elemental forces of nature, of which the cherubim are, partly at least, the symbols, are working out the purposes of Jehovah. The two words translated wheels are different in the Hebrew. The first is singular and collective (*galgal*, the "whirling thing," used of the wheel of a war-chariot, ch. xxiii. 24; Isa. v. 28), and might well be translated "chariot" here. The second, that used in ch. i. 15, 16, also in the singular, is applied to the single wheel of the four by which the angel-ministers stood.

Vers. 8, 9.—The description of the theophany that follows, though essentially identical with that in ch. i., is not a literal transcript of it. The prophet struggles, as before, to relate what he has actually seen in the visions of God. The fact is stated as explaining the mention of the "hand" in ver. 7. That, as in ch. i. 8, was one of their members (see notes on ch. i. 15—17). All that had seemed most startling and awful to him on the banks of Chebar is now seen again—the four living creatures, now named cherubim, the wheel by each, the unswerving motion of the wheels in their onward course.

Ver. 11.—**Whither the head, etc.** The word has been taken, as in Job xxix. 25, for the "chief" or "principal" wheel, that which for the time determined the course of the others. With all the complex structure of the cherubic chariot, all was simple in its action. The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels, and that gave unity (ch. i. 20).

Ver. 12.—**And their whole body.** Here there is distinctly a new feature. In ch. i. 18 the "rings" of the wheels were "full of eyes." Here the eyes are everywhere. It is not hard to interpret this part of the vision. The prophet receives a new impression of the all-seeing eye of Jehovah. Everywhere, as he stands face to face with the forces of nature, he can say, *must* say, within himself, "Thou God seest me" (Gen. xvi. 13). There is an eye that looks upon him where he least expects it. The same thought appears in the stone with seven eyes in Zech. iii. 9. St. John reproduces it in the same form as Ezekiel, with the exception of the wheels, which form no part of his vision, in Rev. iv. 6.

Ver. 13.—**As for the wheels, etc.**; better, with the Revised Version, *they were called in my hearing, the whirling wheels*; or better still, to keep the collective force of the singular *galgal, the chariot.* He recognized that as the right name of the whole mysterious and complex form. It was nothing less than the chariot-throne of the King of the universe. There is no sufficient reason for taking the noun, with the Authorized Version, as a vocative.

Ver. 14.—**The first face was the face of a cherub, etc.**; better, with the Revised Version, *of the cherub.* This takes the place of "the face of an ox" in ch. i. 10, and it is first in order instead of being, as there, the third. It is as though, in this second vision, he recognizes that this was emphatically *the* cherubic form. Possibly the article indicates that this was the form that had given the "coals of fire" in ver. 7. Each form, we must remember, had the four faces, but the prophet names the face which each presented to him as he gazed.

Vers. 15—17.—As he gazes, the recognition is complete. What he sees in the courts of the temple is identical with the living creature by the river of Chebar. It moves as that moved, wheels and wings and cherubim, all as by one harmonious impulse.

Ver. 18.—**Then the glory of the Lord, etc.** The chariot-throne was, as it were, ready for its kingly Rider. The "glory"-cloud, or Shechinah, takes its place over them, and the departure begins. From that hour the temple was, in Ezekiel's thoughts, to be, till the time of restoration contemplated in ch. xl.—xlviii., what Shiloh had been, a God-deserted place. We are reminded of the voice which Josephus tells us was heard before the final destruction of the second temple, exclaiming, "Let us depart hence," as the priests were making ready for the Pentecostal feast ('Bell. Jud.,' vi. 5. 3).

Ver. 19.—The departure has the east gate of the Lord's house for its starting-point. By that gate, in the later vision of the restored temple, the glory of the Lord was to return (ch. xliii. 4). For "every one" read "it," *sc.* the *galgal*, or complex structure of the chariot. The Hebrew verb is in the singular, but, as the italics show, there is no word answering to "every one."

Ver. 20.—Once more the prophet asserts, with fresh emphasis, the identity of the two visions which it had been given him to see. Now, as it were, he understands why the first vision was seen as coming from the north. He does not tell us whether the journey of which he saw the beginning was to end. For the present there was a halt, as we learn from ch. xi. 23, "over the midst of the city." Even when the vision ended, it had not gone further than the Mount of Olives. We may conjecture, however, that he thought of its goal as that more sacred region of the heavens in which it had at first manifested itself (see note on ch. i. 4). It was, at any rate, no longer in the temple. The banks of Chebar or any other place might become, as Bethel had been to Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 17), as "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven."

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—*The throne of God.* The Greek conception of God was intellectual; the Hebrew, moral. To the Hellenic thought he was the Supreme Mind; to the Jewish he was the Supreme Will and Authority. The one conceived him as the Architect of the universe, displaying his intelligence in a vast design; the other, as the Sovereign Ruler of all things. Thus the Hebrew symbol of the Divine is a glory above a heavenly throne, and with the Jew the most significant Divine thing is the throne. Each thought is true, and our later Christian theology combines them both. But there is an awful sublimity in the Old Testament religion springing from the moral and governmental view of God, and to miss this is to sink into naturalism. The modern tendency is in some respects diverting attention from the Hebrew Throne to the Greek Mind. We need to revive the Old Testament element of the thought of God. Perhaps greater regard to this will help us to face some of the peculiar difficulties of our own day.

I. THE THRONE OF GOD IS SUPREME. The throne seen in Ezekiel's vision was "in the firmament that was above *the head* of the cherubim." The most exalted and glorious beings lie at the foot of that awful throne. 1. *God rules.* He is will as well as thought. He does not merely know; he acts. 2. *God rules in the present.* Men rebel against the authority of God. Nevertheless, it still exists. It is not only that we *shall* appear before a future judgment-bar of God. Already we live under his constant reign. 3. *God's rule is supreme.* Death, sin, Satan, are all beneath God, and ultimately they will be conquered and crushed, that he may be all in all Even Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, is "subject to him" (1 Cor. xv. 27, 28).

II. THE THRONE OF GOD IS RIGHTEOUS AND THEREFORE GLORIOUS. 1. *It is righteous.* The justice of God's rule is not treated in the Old Testament as a source of terror, but, on the contrary, it is always praised and rejoiced in. The old cruel earthly tyrannies were felt to be so horribly unjust, that men turned with a sense of relief to the justice of the Supreme King. God is the Personal "Power that makes for righteousness." The end of his government is the highest goodness. 2. *It is therefore glorious.* The old glory of mere brute force with the triumph of cruelty is a low and vulgar folly by the side of this Divine glory of righteousness. Here is the greatest glory of God—not his omniscience nor his omnipotence, not the irresistible might and overwhelming majesty of his throne, but its righteousness. It is not a blood-stained glory of the earthly conqueror, but the sapphire beauty of perfect purity, truth, justice, and benevolence.

III. THE THRONE OF GOD IS A CENTRE OF DIVINE REVELATION. The Greek method of seeking for God is by the way of intellect. The Great Mind is looked for in his plans. The Architect of the universe is to be found by using the "argument from design." But latterly this Aristotelian method has been confused in the minds of some—though, doubtless, only temporarily and by misunderstanding—through the spread of the doctrine of evolution. Meanwhile our own age seems to need to return to the Hebrew method. Our best teachers point us in this direction. God is not chiefly the Infinite Intellect. He is the Will and the Power of right. We feel him in all force. But we discern him best in our own consciences. The unanswerable voice within that whispers, "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not," is an utterance from the throne of God, and it bears witness to the existence, and more than the existence, the authority, of our supreme Lord and King.

Ver. 2.—"*Coals of fire.*" The coals of fire which Ezekiel saw between the cherubim were to be poured forth in destruction upon the doomed city of Jerusalem. But there are various uses of Divine fire. Let us notice some of them.

I. COALS OF FIRE FOR DESTRUCTION. This dreadful destiny of Divine fire must be considered first, as it was the one intended by the prophet. "Our God is a consuming Fire." There is not only punishment, there is destruction in the operation of fire. It hurts, but it also consumes; and its primary work is destruction. "The wages of sin is death." God does not only chastise with the rod; he destroys with his fire. The earlier chastisement is to save from the later destruction. We may be thankful for the sharp lash if it drives us from the burning fire.

II. COALS OF FIRE FOR PURIFICATION. Fire does not only destroy; it refines. Refuse is burnt by it; silver is purified. God sends fiery trials to cleanse our souls by burning out the evil, and leaving the better nature freer and purged. Perhaps the fire which would be for destruction if we remained impenitent may be converted into a refiner's furnace when we learn its burning lesson, and humble ourselves in the very flames of wrath. So let us use the fiery trials of life.

III. COALS OF FIRE FOR CONSECRATION. The whole offering of Jewish sacrifice was burnt upon the altar. There is a consuming zeal of God which wholly takes possession of his consecrated servant, and burns through him, so that he is no longer a slave of the earth, but is lifted up as on Elijah's chariot. Still living in this world, indeed, for the service of God, he feels that the old Adam has been killed, the evil of his nature has been burnt out of him, self has been slain, and now he belongs wholly to God. Alas! so perfect a consecration is not attained by any of us. But Christ's baptism in fire leads us up to it. It is a supreme mistake to suppose that our Lord calls us only to ease and rest. He calls to the pilgrimage, the battle, the cross, perhaps to the furnace. Even when life outside is smooth, the consecration of will and passion means a fiery ordeal.

IV. COALS OF FIRE FOR INSPIRATION. The engine is driven by coals of fire. Our physical energy is dependent on the burning up of the tissue of our bodies. The heat of enthusiasm is the inspiration and source of energy for mental and moral enterprises. Love is a great fire of burning coals, and when it becomes bright and warm, the soul grows strong for sacrifice and service. We may have false fires, indeed, fires of earthly passion that scorch and wither our better nature. No earth-born fire will kindle the devotion of the soul. For this live coals from off God's altar are needed. The fire from between the cherubim kindles our fire. The great love of Christ coming like coals of fire can give us warmth of love and devotion, and inspire us for the Christian life.

Ver. 4.—*The moving glory.* It is difficult to follow the enraptured prophet through all the mystic mazes of his vision, and catch the meaning of the many gorgeous symbols that he discovers on every hand. But now and again certain points stand out with an individual significance even when their relation to the whole shifting panorama may strike us as somewhat obscure. Here we may take some hints from the moving of the Divine glory. This radiance moved from over the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house.

I. GOD'S GLORY HAS COME FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH. Ezekiel saw the radiance pass from the cherub to the threshold of the house. 1. *The glory has visited earth.* It is not confined to celestial altitudes. Earth is not yet a godless hell. God, who talked with Adam before the Fall, also talked with Moses after the Fall. There is a Divine halo about every good life. Little children come "trailing clouds of glory," and "of such is the kingdom of heaven." But this glory is most present in Christ. Thus the beloved disciple said, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father" (John i. 14). 2. *The glory has reached common life.* There were cherubim in the holy of holies at the temple, and there the Shechinah was said to dwell. But now Ezekiel sees the glory pass to the threshold of the house. It moves from the high priest's sanctuary to the way of the common people, and seems to look forth from the doorway with cheering radiance and a benediction towards the great world outside. This has certainly happened in the free preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the equal privileges of all Christians. The Shechinah passed from the temple at Jerusalem to the Carpenter's workshop at Nazareth; and ever since it has dwelt among the familiar haunts of men, consecrating daily toil, making simple lives beautiful with the light of God.

II. GOD'S GLORY IS IN MOVEMENT. The fiery pillar of the wilderness moved from place to place. When by the Red Sea, it stood behind the camp and between this and the pursuing army of Egypt. In travel, it went on before the host. The presence of God is not always equally manifest at the same place. There are God-haunted realms, and there are apparently God-deserted regions. Physically, God is equally present everywhere. But morally, the conduct of men does not admit of an equal revelation of the Divine. 1. *The glory may depart from its old seat.* It left the temple, and it deserted the Jews. Poor down-trodden Palestine is now only to be called a "Holy Land" for the sake of its memories and associations. North Africa and Asia Minor, once the brightest centres of the Christian Church, have been left dark and deserted. This is not owing to God's changing. His glory is not like the waning moon, or the setting sun, or the flickering lamp. But as men forsake him, "Ichabod!" must be uttered over their most sacred spots. 2. *The glory may visit new scenes.* It has shone over the martyrs of Madagascar and Uganda, and the native missionaries of the South Seas; it is beginning to dawn in the great dark continent, and among the teeming millions of India and China. There is no dark soul over which it will not shine, if only pardon is penitently sought.

Ver. 8.—"*The form of a man's hand.*" Those strange composite creatures, the cherubim of Ezekiel's vision, have been described earlier as of human aspect (ch. i. 5), and in particular as having "the hands of a man" (ch. i. 8). This appearance of the hand is again referred to in the verse before us, so that we are led to think not merely of a general resemblance to human features, but of some special importance in the particular member thus emphatically and repeatedly named.

I. THE HAND IS MADE FOR WORK. So wonderful a mechanism is there in it, that a whole Bridgewater Treatise was devoted to an examination of its teleological significance. No machine of most delicate workmanship approaches the construction of the human hand. In familiar transactions of business "hand-made" goods are preferred to the "machine-made." Now, the natural form of the hand shows that it is designed for work. It may be clenched into the fist for fighting, but this is not its natural condition, and all the finer qualities of fingers and thumb are here wasted. A clublike end to the arm would be better than a flat palm and supple fingers, if the primary purpose of the hand were pugilism. Nature declares that we are not made to fight; we are made to work.

II. HANDIWORK IS DIVINE AND HOLY. There are hands in heaven. By a figure of speech, God is said to have hands (*e.g.* Ps. viii. 6). The cherubim have hands. The strange thing is that these wondrous beings have *both* wings and hands, combining the flight of a bird with the work of a man. This is the ideal state—to be able to soar aloft in heavenly regions, and yet to have faculty for practical tasks. Too often winged souls lack working hands. They who soar, dream; they who work, plod. The perfect pattern of life represented by the cherubim is that of wings and hands—power of flight and skill in work, poetry and practice, devotion and service, contemplation and activity, aspiration and application. Seen in heaven, the hands are holy. The shrivelled, paralyzed hand of the fakir is a token of fanatical folly. There is no disgrace in the horny hand of toil. Work is Divine; for God works (John v. 17). Work is heavenly. There will be service in heaven. There is no paradise for the indolent.

III. THE HAND NEEDS TO BE REDEEMED. Sometimes it is brutalized into a weapon of hatred. Frequently it is soiled by deeds of evil. The swift, silent hand of the thief is a degraded hand. Every sin stains the hand that performs the wicked action. If the human hand expressed the character of the work it is sometimes put to, it would be twisted, knotty, foul, sore, rotten. The hand wants redemption—a redemption which follows that of the head. For the poor hand is but the servant of the head, that shames it with evil orders. When Christ saves a soul, he brings "the redemption of the body." The hand is then made holy—only to work what is good, only to write what is true, ready to stoop to uplift the fallen, to grasp with friendly pressure the hand of a poor distressed brother, to point to the way of heavenly perfection.

Ver. 18.—*Glory departed.* In ver. 4 Ezekiel says that the glory visited the threshold of the house. Now he describes its departure and return to the cherubim.

I. THE GLORY OF NEW DIVINE REVELATIONS HAS DEPARTED. The glory that visited the threshold of the temple brought a special symbolical revelation, and when that revelation had been made the glory retreated and left the scene in its normal earthly condition. Revelation has come in epochs separated by periods of assimilation, when the newly revealed truth has been left to work among man like leaven. God gave the Law once for all from Sinai. The gospel was brought into the world by Christ and his apostles, and left there to spread—not left without the aid of God's Spirit and that inward revelation by which an old truth becomes new in each fresh heart that receives it, but still given as a completed thing in respect to its facts and substance. We have no more prophets like Isaiah nor apostles like St. Paul. But we do not need them, for Christ has given us the perfect truth for all time. Yet we cannot but feel that there was a wonder and a beauty in those old days when the glory of the growing revelation was flashing out upon an astonished world.

II. THE GLORY OF HIGHEST RAPTURE WILL DEPART. There are times when heaven is opened and we see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. Then we would fain build our tabernacles and retain the rare delight. But it is not to be. These angel-visits are few and far between. Jacob wakes from his dream to the chill loneliness of the desolate hills of Bethel. The disciples who have witnessed the Transfiguration must descend from Hermon to the troubles of the plain, and exchange the society of Moses and Elijah for that of a raving lunatic. It is rare for the soul to be in a condition to enjoy the greatest bliss. But it is not necessary that this condition should remain; indeed, it is better to be in quieter moods for the homely tasks of life. Therefore we must still tread this lower earth, though we may have some fine glimpses of the heavenly splendour. The spray that is flung off from the great ocean of celestial bliss may occasionally reach us in drops of gold. Yet our vocation is to walk by faith. Meanwhile the departure of this glory does not mean the departure of God; he is with us in the dullest days. Nor does it mean our fall and shame; it may be best for the faithful servant to work in quiet without the full revelation of the Divine presence. We need ceaseless grace; we can wait for eternal glory.

III. THE GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MAY DEPART. There is a glory which should be on us and abiding with us. All Christians are "called to be saints." Few of us may behold the celestial splendour, but all of us should wear the aureole of purity. When we have washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the new glory of pardon and cleansing should abide. But, alas! even this glory too soon departs; the cleansed garments are again dragged through the mire, and the Christian, though renewed by Christ, dares not regard himself as a "saint." When he falls into a great sin the glory has indeed departed. If the fresh fervour of youth fades, and a commonplace character is all that remains, must it not be said that the *glory* has departed, though the *faith* and *fidelity* may remain?

Ver. 22.—*Heavenly changelessness.* There is great resemblance between ch. i. and ch. x. Ezekiel is transported in spirit from the banks of the Babylonian river Chebar to the temple at Jerusalem. Yet the cherubim which he sees in the one place are exactly the same as those he has seen in the other. This fact of identity in great diversity of circumstances strikes the prophet as remarkable, and he chronicles it with emphasis. Earthly scenes change; heavenly facts remain.

I. THE RANGE OF HEAVENLY CHANGELESSNESS. 1. *In various times.* Divine grace is always essentially the same. On the very threshold of history Abraham is justified by faith; to-day faith is the one ground of the soul's becoming right with God. The Psalms of David express the inmost essence of religion for modern Christians. The gospel of the first century is the gospel for the nineteenth century. The Christ of history is the Christ of the future. If we can see the old familiar countenances of the essential Divine facts that cheered and warned and guided our fathers, we have just the vision that we need to-day—though, indeed, the old truths are to have fresh applications, and though, perhaps, we may have to remove the veils with which the errors of the past have sometimes obscured them. 2. *In various places.* The cherubim of Chebar were the cherubim of Jerusalem. The Christ of Nazareth is the Christ for London. The religion that dawned among the hills of Galilee spreads like a day over the whole earth, and shows itself as suitable for England as for the East, and as suitable for China and Africa and New Guinea as for Europe and America. 3. *Under various circumstances.* The quiet river-bank was very different from noisy Jerusalem. Yet the same wondrous cherubim looked down upon both scenes, as the same stars of heaven gaze upon the city slums and the country villages, on the blood-stained battle-field and the peaceful meadow. The same God is over all. The gospel of Christ is the same for all—rich and poor, learned and ignorant, young and old.

II. THE CAUSES OF HEAVENLY CHANGELESSNESS. 1. *Inherent truth.* Our better changes come largely from the correction of mistakes. We are always having to unlearn our errors, to slough the old skin. But truth abides. In heaven all is true. God's Word is true. Therefore while "all flesh is grass . . . and the grass withers . . . the Word of the Lord abideth for ever" (1 Pet. i. 24, 25). 2. *Absolute perfection.* Revelation came by stages of growth and development and through human channels. Hence its changes and the putting away of the old form of it in the Law for the new form of it in the gospel. But when we see through these earthly manifestations the really Divine behind them, we come upon absolute perfection, which is changeless. 3. *Stable constancy.* God is not fickle. His representative agents, symbolized by the cherubim, must be constant too. God will keep to his word. Therefore we may build upon his promise as on a granite rock. We change; he abideth faithful.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 1.—*The throne of Deity.* The prophet, in this chapter, makes use of all the wealth of earthly and human imagery to enhance his readers' conception of the glory of the Eternal. The throne here pictured is the throne of God, and the metaphor is employed in order to gather around the Deity all associations which may help to raise the thoughts in reverence, confidence, and adoration towards the King of the universe. At the same time, every figure drawn from earth, from man, must needs come short of the great reality; for the finite can do no more than merely suggest the Infinite.

I. GOD IS THE SUPREME KING BY UNDERIVED RIGHT. Earthly monarchs reign by right of conquest, or election, or inheritance. They come to reign, they begin to reign. In these respects there is contrast between the sovereigns who bear sway among men and the King of kings and Lord of lords; for he is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. To examine, to question, to vindicate his right is an absurdity, an impossibility; it is the condition and foundation of all rights, and is indemonstrable and self-evident.

II. GOD IS SUPREME IN THE POSSESSION AND EXERCISE OF KINGLY POWER. Earthly sovereigns differ one from another in the military and naval forces they command, in the weight they bring to the councils of nations, in the respect and fear with which they are regarded. But there is no measure by which power such as emperors wield can be compared with Omnipotence. There is One, and there can be only One, who is almighty, who wields all the resources of the universe, and of whom it may be said that all the manifestations of his might are "but the whisperings of his power."

III. GOD IS SUPREME IN THE UNIVERSALITY OF HIS DOMINION. Vast as are the realms of the greatest of earthly potentates, these are but a speck, a mote, when placed beside the kingdom of the Creator. For this both transcends all and includes all the kingdoms of the earth: "His kingdom ruleth over all."

IV. GOD IS SUPREME IN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH IS CHARACTERISTIC OF HIS SWAY. The true glory of a prince does not lie so much in the extent of his dominions as in the justice of his rule and administration. All human righteousness is a mere reflection of the righteousness of the great King of heaven and earth. "A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." A throne is sometimes thought of in association with the arbitrary and despotic exercise of power; all such associations must be dismissed when we come to think and speak of the Occupant of the throne of heaven. There may be that in his government which perplexes and baffles us; but nothing is so certain to our minds as his unswerving rectitude, his inflexible justice. Our highest powers of veneration are inadequate to conceive and to adore his moral attributes. Our proper attitude is to fall down before him and acknowledge the insufficiency of our purest homage.

V. GOD IS SUPREME IN HIS CLAIM UPON ALL HIS INTELLIGENT CREATION FOR HONOUR AND GLORY. It is sometimes represented by utilitarian thinkers that men's faculties are misused and their time wasted in the attempt to "glorify God." But the view of human nature is indeed both superficial and radically false which admits of such an objection to the practice of devotion. The worship which consists only of words and gestures is indeed an unprofitable superstition. But the worship which is spiritual is both acceptable to God and profitable and elevating to man. It is well to conceive of God as a King as well as a Father. Many human relationships must concur in order to present to our minds the claims of God upon our nature. To Christians the throne of Christ is the throne of God. "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!"—T.

Ver. 4.—*The brightness of the Divine glory.* The Shechinah-cloud in the holiest place was the visible representation and symbol of the presence of the Eternal in the place set apart for special communion between God and man. Appealing primarily to the sense of sight, it did in reality appeal to the intelligence and the conscience of the people. It was the same luminous cloud which Ezekiel beheld in his vision, and in which he recognized the manifestation of the Divine presence and interest.

I. THE TRUE GLORY OF THE LORD CONSISTS IN HIS MORAL ATTRIBUTES. The Jews ever required a sign. But whilst the multitude may have rested in the sign, the enlightened and spiritual passed from the sign to the thing signified. True glory is not in material splendour, however dazzling, but in that excellence which is perfected in God, the Source of all goodness. Whilst the less reflecting may be more impressed with the omnipotence and omnipresence of God, which must indeed excite the reverent admiration of all to whom he makes himself known, such as are morally cultivated and susceptible will find the highest and purest glory in the Divine wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and love.

II. THIS GLORY IS PECULIARLY IMPRESSIVE WHERE THERE IS SPIRITUAL SUSCEPTIBILITY. As the man is affected by many things which are neither felt nor noticed by the brute, so the spiritually living and earnest are impressed and influenced by the contemplation of the Divine character and attributes. These may have no interest for the worldly and the selfish; but they are felt to be great, sacred, and precious realities by all natures that are brought by spiritual teaching into sympathy with God. "They are spiritually discerned." There is a capacity within us which is only developed and satisfied when brought into contact with the purity and the grace of him who is a Spirit, and who will be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

III. THE VISION OF THIS BRIGHTNESS IS A MOTIVE AND STIMULUS TO HUMAN OBEDIENCE AND PRAISE. The hosts of heaven gaze upon the Divine glory, and by the vision are prompted to unceasing adoration. It is the same with the enlightened and spiritual among the sons of men. As the daybreak and the sunrise call forth the glad song of the lark as it soars aloft, so the rising of "the brightness of the Lord's glory" upon a soul summons it to the glad exercise of exulting adoration. Nor does this form the only response. Man's active nature renders the service which is due to him who is recognized as the Source of all good, of all blessing. Obedience is acted praise, as praise is uttered obedience.

IV. TO THE CHRISTIAN THE LORD JESUS IS THE RICHEST REVELATION OF THE DIVINE GLORY. The evangelist tells us that he and his fellow-disciples beheld Christ's glory, "the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Son of God as "the Emanation from the Divine glory." They who look into Christ's face behold the moral attributes of Deity in all their resplendent brightness. "They look unto him, and are lightened, and their faces are not ashamed."—T.

Ver. 5.—"*The voice of the Almighty.*" The human voice deserves to be studied and admired as a most effective and delicate and exquisitely beautiful provision for the expression of thought and feeling. It is so ethereal, so semi-spiritual, that there seems scarcely any anthropomorphism in attributing it to the Creator himself. The sounds of nature may indeed be designated the voice of God. But the characteristics of the human utterance seem most justly attributable to him who comprehends in perfection within himself all those thoughts and emotions which are distinctive of the spiritual nature.

I. THE EXPRESSION CASTS LIGHT UPON THE NATURE OF GOD. The voice is, among all the inhabitants of this earth, man's prerogative alone. And for this reason—man alone has reason, and therefore he alone has speech. There are noises and sounds, and even musical sounds, in nature; but to man alone belongs the voice, the organ of articulate speech and intelligible language. When voice is attributed to the Almighty God, it is implied that he is himself in perfection that Reason which he communicates to his creature man. Our intellect and thought are derived from his, and are akin to his; our reason is "the candle of the Lord" within.

II. THE EXPRESSION CASTS LIGHT UPON THE INTERCOURSE BETWEEN GOD AND MAN. The purpose of the voice is that man may communicate with his fellow-man by means of articulate language, and by means of all those varied and delicate shades of intonation by which we convey our sentiments, and indicate satisfaction and disapproval, confidence and distrust, tenderness and severity, inquiry and command. Now, where we meet in Scripture with the phrase, "the voice of God Almighty when he speaketh," we are led to think of the purpose for which he utters his voice. It is evidently to communicate with man—mind with mind—that we may be acquainted with his thoughts, his wishes, his sentiments with regard to us, if we may use language so human. The whole of nature may be regarded as uttering the Divine thought, though, as the psalmist tells us, "there is no speech nor language, and their voice cannot be heard." But his articulate speech comes through the medium of human minds—the minds of prophets and apostles, and (above all) the mind of Christ Jesus. The Word speaks with the Divine voice; in him alone that voice reaches us with all the faultless tones, and with the perfect revelation which we need in order that we may realize and rejoice in the presence of the Divine Father of spirits, the Divine Saviour and Helper.

III. This expression casts light upon the duty and privilege of man. 1. It is ours to listen with grateful joy to the voice of God. "The friend of the bridegroom rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." Christ speaks, and his utterances are welcome to every believing and sympathetic nature; they are as the sound of a voice long expected and wished for, as it now falls upon the listening and eager ear. The sinner may well dread the voice which can speak to him as with the thunder of threatened vengeance. But the Christian recognizes the tones of love and the accents of gentleness. 2. It is ours to listen to the voice of God with believing submission and obedience. God's voice is always with authority. Because he reveals himself as our Father, he does not cease to command. "Ye have not heard his voice at any time," was the stern reproach addressed by Jesus to the unspiritual Jews. The exhortation comes to us all, "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."—T.

Vers. 1—22.—*The machinery of God's providence.* A man must be embodied ignorance who should suppose that all the activities of God's government come within the range of his vision. Our knowledge is *not* the measure of existence.

"There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

What we *know* is an infinitesimal fraction of what we do not know. Hence every revelation of God's administrative rule should be welcomed with eager delight.

I. God's essential majesty is inconceivable. The difficulty for man to comprehend the nature and government of God lies, not on the part of God, but on the part of man. His spiritual nature is so environed with bars of flesh that he cannot discern spiritual realities. Truth finds its way into his mind mainly by the use of sensuous images. The difficulty is aggravated by long habits of neglect and self-indulgence. Under these circumstances, the marvel is that he knows as much about the world as he does. We can form no definite conception of the Infinite or of the Eternal; yet it appears to our reason that God must be infinite in capacity and eternal in duration. Possibly, God is above the conception of the oldest archangel. Possibly, God cannot reveal the whole extent of his nature to any created being. Certain it is that the wing of human imagination soon tires in its attempt to soar to the height of the Godhead. All the machinery of his rule is in harmony with himself—majestic, ethereal, sublime! How shall man measure himself with God? Surely he is but a mote in the sunbeam, incomparably minute, yet to God incomparably precious!

II. God's presence, without a cloud, is to man insupportable. On every occasion on which God has condescended to reveal himself to men there has been the attendant circumstance of a cloud. "God is light;" but to human sensibilities the full blaze of light is insufferable. When God appeared to Moses among the solitudes of Horeb, "the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud." The presence of God among the Hebrews in the desert was symbolized by the pillar of cloud. At the moment when the first Jewish temple was consecrated to the service of Jehovah, a mysterious "cloud filled the house of the Lord." God was known to abide in the holy of holies, in the cloud that covered the mercy-seat. When Moses and Elijah descended to commune with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, "a cloud overshadowed them," and the voice of the Father "was heard out of the cloud." At the close of our Lord's earthly mission he ascended from earth to heaven from the heights near Bethany, "and a cloud received him out of the apostles' sight." So too the prophecies which announce the next appearance of our Lord indicate the surroundings of a cloud: "Behold! he cometh with clouds;" "Ye shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." Clouds distribute and attenuate the fierce light of the sun, and enhance the splendours of the scene. They are a manifestation of the component parts of light. They reveal its beauty and its power. So God attempers the brightness of his essential glory to suit the necessities of men.

III. GOD'S ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IS AN ELABORATE AND COMPLEX SYSTEM. Human agency is intimately allied with the dynamic forces of nature on the one side, and with the active powers of angels on the other. The wheels (with the numerical symbol, four), impressive from their magnitude and their rotatory speed, indicate the mighty forces of nature. Even in these wheels the prophet discovers eyes, which are the symbol of intelligence. The cherubic beings are represented as combining the strength of the ox, the courage of the lion, the swiftness of the eagle, and the intelligence of man. Beneath their wings there is seen, ever and anon, a human hand—the index of human agency and action. Resting on this complex system of cherubic life is seen the cerulean throne of God, bright as a sapphire stone. In the destruction of Jerusalem the Chaldean armies did not act alone. Nebuchadnezzar, probably, was not conscious that any power, other than his own will, was instigating him to the war. Nevertheless, he was an instrument of justice in the hand of God. There is much service done for God which is not intended. Said God respecting Cyrus, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me." Human kings and warriors are only parts of a complex system. Human will has a very limited circle in which to play; yet it has its place.

IV. IN THIS COMPLEX SYSTEM THE MEDIATOR FULFILS AN IMPORTANT PART. (Ver. 2.) "The man clothed with linen" clearly represents the great High Priest—the Divine Mediator. He who brings mercy to men is also the Minister of judgment. He who proclaims "the acceptable year of the Lord" announces also "the day of vengeance of our God." God will "judge the world by that Man whom he hath ordained." If the great Shepherd will preserve his flock, he must destroy the wolves. Justice and mercy go hand-in-hand. As we see here the ministrations of angels, along with God's Son, in the work of destruction; so in later days we see, in fact, the alliance of angels with Christ in the work of men's salvation. Nor should we fail to overlook the promptitude with which the Son fulfilled his Father's word, "Go in between the wheels, . . . and fill thine hand with coals of fire, . . . and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight." Is not this a practical commentary upon Messiah's words, "I do always the things that please him"? So with all God's servants, "They go straight forward."

V. GOD ENTERS UPON THE WORK OF DESTRUCTION SLOWLY AND RELUCTANTLY. We read in the fourth verse that the glory of the Lord withdrew from the inner court of the temple, and stood over the threshold of the house. Again, we read in the eighteenth verse that "the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight." Again, in the next chapter the record runs, "And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city." With slow and successive steps God departed from the sanctuary which he had chosen for his residence. All this prefigured the "leaving the house desolate," and the ascension from the Mount of Olives," by our Lord. So has it always been. The axe is laid at the root of the tree—a delay of judgment—that the tree may yet become fruitful. Infinite patience belongs to God. He "is slow to anger, while plenteous in mercy." A great truth is embodied in the old adage—

"The mill of God grinds slowly,
But it grinds exceeding small."

VI. WE DISCOVER IN THIS VISION THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE. Between this unveiling of God's purposes respecting Israel, and his purposes towards the world revealed in the Apocalypse of John, there are instructive resemblances. The cherubic forms again appear. Angels have special charge over the forces of nature—winds and fire and earthquake. So far as human vision reaches, kings and armies act by their own free-will, and to accomplish their own ambitions; but when we are lifted up to God's pedestal, and are shown the progress of events from that high standpoint, we see that a series of Divine agents is employed—men fulfilling their part in subordination to angelic ministers. In God's great army we have generals and captains and lieutenants, as well as the rank-and-file. In the government of the universe, men fill a humble though an honourable place; and consequent on their diligence and fidelity now will be their promotion to higher office by-and-by. "Be thou ruler over *five* cities!" "Be thou ruler over *ten* cities!" "*I* appoint unto you kingdoms, as my Father hath appointed me."—D.

Vers. 1, 2, 6, 7.—*The vision of judgment by fire.* "Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim," etc. The vision recorded in this chapter is substantially a repetition of that which is described in the first chapter, as the prophet himself intimates (vers. 20, 22). The only differences of any importance are that the prophet was not in the same place when he received this vision as when he received its counterpart, and that the symbolical actions in this have not occurred before. We shall not again notice those features of the manifestation which we considered in our treatment of the first chapter, but shall confine our attention to the symbolical actions, and at present to the scattering of coals of fire over the city. The work of judgment begun in the last chapter is continued in this one. The destroying angels have (in vision) gone forth slaying the guilty people; the dead bodies were lying in the temple courts and the city streets; and now the command is given to finish the work of judgment by scattering coals of fire over the city, and so destroying it. Three chief points call for attention.

I. THE AUTHOR OF THIS JUDGMENT. "He spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels," etc. The Speaker is the enthroned One: "God the Father sitting on the throne, to the Son, to whom he has given full power to execute judgment" (John v. 27). Notice: 1. *The majesty of his state.* (Ver. 1.) It is not said that any manifestation or appearance of God was given in this vision. But Ezekiel beheld the appearance of the exalted throne over the cherubim, a throne as of pure and brilliant sapphire like the clear and deep vault of heaven. "The heaven-like colour of the throne indicates," says Hengstenberg, "the infinite eminence of God's dominion over the earth, with its impotence, sin, and unrighteousness." The representation is intended to shadow forth the glory of God. How glorious he is! The glory of heavenly things far surpasses the highest glory of earth, and the glory of God transcends the highest of heaven. He is "glorious in holiness;" "the glorious Lord;" "the King of glory;" "the God of glory;" "the Father of glory;" and his kingdom is glorious in majesty. 2. *The sovereignty of his authority.* God is supreme over the forces of nature, symbolized by the wheels; over every form of life, symbolized by the cherubim, or "living creatures" (ch. i.); over the six destroying angels (ch. ix.); and in a sense over "the man clothed with linen," who is the Agent of the Father (cf. John xiv. 31; xv. 10; xvii. 18). He commands the scattering of fire over the city. The Chaldeans could not have laid waste Jerusalem but for his permission. "His kingdom ruleth over all." "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain."

II. THE GREAT AGENT OF THIS JUDGMENT. "And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels," etc. The man clothed in linen, who was to scatter the coals of fire over the city, was, as we have seen, the angel of Jehovah, otherwise called the angel of the covenant. Notice: 1. *The diverse functions ascribed to him.* In the preceding chapter he was summoned to the preservation of the pious; in this he is sent forth to complete the work of destruction because of sin. This is suggestive of his two comings into our world. He came as a Saviour, to bring forgiveness to sinners, and deliverance from sin, and comfort for mourners, and strength for the weak, and hope for the despairing, and to scatter wide the blessings of Divine grace. But he will come again as a Judge in dreadful majesty. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, rendering vengeance on them that know not God," etc. But a more correct and complete analogy to these diverse functions ascribed to him in this vision is in the fact that in his future coming he will both perfect the salvation of his people, and deliver over to punishment those who have rejected him. That coming will be either the cause of ineffable rapture and adoration (Rev. vii. 9—17), or of unutterable terror and anguish to every man (Rev. vi. 15—17). 2. *The prompt obedience rendered by him.* "And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubim; then he went in," etc. (vers. 6, 7). His delight was in doing the will of his Father. "Jesus saith, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And at the close of his mission upon earth, he said with infinite satisfaction, "Father, . . . I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." He complied with his Father's will at all times, in all things, and with his whole heart. How perfect is the example which he sets us in this respect! Let us imitate him, endeavouring to obey the holy will even as he did.

III. THE MEANS OF THIS JUDGMENT. "Fill thine hand with coals of fire, . . . and scatter them over the city." The fire denoted was elemental fire; for it was taken from between the wheels, and the wheels symbolize the forces of nature; and it was to be used in burning the city. In this use of fire we have an illustration of: 1. *A most useful servant becoming a most terrible foe.* The Most High, if he pleases, can turn our greatest comforts into our direst curses; and he may do so if we misuse them. "They had abused fire," says Greenhill, "to maintain their gluttony, for fulness of bread was one of their sins; they burned incense to idols, and abused the altar fire, which had been the greatest refreshing to their souls; . . . and now even this fire kindled upon them." And as a matter of fact, fire was used in destroying the temple and other places in Jerusalem. Josephus tells how Nebuzaradan, by command of the King of Babylon, having despoiled the temple of its precious and sacred treasures, set fire to it. "When he had carried these off, he set fire to the temple in the fifth month, the first day of the month, in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah, and in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar; he also burnt the palace and overthrew the city" ('Ant.,' x. viii. 5). 2. *The divers uses of fire as represented in Holy Scripture.* It is there used to set forth both cleansing and avenging powers. It is the symbol of the purification of the human heart and life from sin (Isa. vi. 6, 7; Mal. iii. 2, 3). It is also the symbol of the punishment of the incorrigibly corrupt (Matt. xxv. 41). "Our God is a consuming Fire;" and we must each be brought consciously near unto him, either to be cleansed from our sin, or, failing in this, to bear the just judgment thereof; for the Divine fire is essentially antagonistic to sin.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Let us eschew every form of sin.* 2. *Let us seek the application of the purifying fire of the Divine love to our hearts.*—W. J.

Vers. 4, 18, 19; and ch. xi. 22, 23.—*The withdrawal of the presence of God from a guilty people.* "Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house," etc. These verses, which are all essentially related to one subject, suggest the following observations.

I. THAT GOD NEVER WITHDRAWS HIS GRACIOUS PRESENCE FROM A PERSON OR A NATION UNTIL THEY HAVE QUITE FORSAKEN HIM. The chosen people had despised his laws; they had turned aside from his worship for the most debasing idolatries; they had filled the land with their violence; they had denied his observation of their lives, and his interest therein; and they had persecuted his prophets who called them to repentance. They had abandoned him provokingly and persistently; and now he is about to take from them his gracious presence. That presence he never withdraws from any individual or from any community until he has been rejected—driven away, as it were, by heinous and continued sin. In proof of this we may refer to the following and other portions of the sacred Scriptures: 1 Sam. xv. 23, 26; xxviii. 15—18; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9; 2 Chron. xv. 2; Ps. lxxviii. 56—64; Jer. vii. 8—16.

II. THAT GOD WITHDRAWS HIS GRACIOUS PRESENCE FROM A PERSON OR A NATION VERY GRADUALLY. We have an intimation of his leaving the temple in ch. ix. 3, where the glory of God departs from the holy of holies to the threshold of the house, by which is meant, says Schröder, "the outermost point, where the exit was from the court of the people into the city." In ver. 4 the prophet beholds the same movement repeated. Then in vers. 18 and 19 the Lord's complete abandonment of the temple is symbolically exhibited. And in ch. xi. 22, 23 the symbol of the gracious presence departs from the city, and makes a temporary sojourn on the Mount of Olives before forsaking the land. Thus step by step the symbol of the glory of the Lord goes away from them. It is as though he forsook them with great reluctance. By his servant Hosea he expresses the same truth: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel?" etc. (Hos. xi. 8). It seemed, too, as though he would be entreated by them not to depart from their midst, and moved away so gradually in order that they might so entreat him. And if God withdraws himself, or withholds his gracious influences from any one, he does so, as it were, with measured steps and slow Men are not left to themselves and their own devices hastily. God waits long to be gracious unto man. He does not depart from any one until he has received great and protracted provocation. He is "the God of patience;" and "he delighteth in mercy."

III. **THAT WHEN GOD WITHDRAWS HIS GRACIOUS PRESENCE FROM A PERSON OR NATION THEY ARE BEREFT OF HIS PROTECTION.** Shortly after Ezekiel had seen the glory of God pass away from the holy of holies to the threshold of the house (ch. ix. 3), the destroying angels began their work of slaughter in the temple. And before the complete destruction of the city, the glory of God departed from it to the Mount of Olives. When the Lord had quite withdrawn his gracious presence they were at the mercy of their enemies, and troubles came upon them fast and furiously. "When the sun is in *apogee*," says Greenhill, "gone from us, we have short days and long nights, little light but much darkness; and when God departs, you have much night, and little day left, your comforts fade suddenly, and miseries come upon you swiftly." What a tragical example of this we have in the case of King Saul! When God had departed from him, and answered him no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams, he was sore distressed, and the terrible end was close at hand (1 Sam. xxviii. 15—20; xxxi.). "This is to be forsaken indeed, when God prepares to forsake us. Lo! then more than ever darkness comes over all the powers of man's spirit and over his life, and even trusted, loved countenances of friends go into shadow. Good thoughts grow ever fewer, impulses to prayer ever more rare; admonitions of conscience cease; the holy of holies in the man becomes empty down to the four walls and the usual pious furniture" (Schröder).

CONCLUSION. "Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called To-day; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." And let us pray, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XI.

Ver. 1.—Moreover the Spirit lifted me up, etc. It is noticeable that the position to which Ezekiel was thus transported in his vision from his place in the inner court (ch. viii. 14), was identical with that which he had just seen occupied by the cherub-chariot before its departure (ch. x. 19). What he is about to see will throw light on the significance of their departure. The gate is probably, here as there, that of the court of the temple. **Five and twenty men.** The number at first reminds us of the worshippers of the sun, in ch. viii. 16; but that, as we saw, was probably a company of priests. On the other hand, the two who are named are styled princes of the people, which suggests a lay rather than a priestly status, and they are seen in a different locality. Conjectures as to the significance of the number vary. (1) Two from each tribe of Israel, with the king at their head. (2) Two from each of the twelve divisions of the army, each containing twenty-four thousand men (1 Chron. xxvii. 1—15). (3) Representatives of twelve regions of the city—a kind of municipal council, with their president. Possibly, after all, the number was used more or less vaguely—a "round" number, as we say (Smend). It is probably safe, however, to think of them as representing the lay element of authority. Nothing is known further as to the persons named. Jaazaniah is distinguished by his parentage from his namesake of ch. viii. 11 and Jer. xxxv. 3. Both were probably familiar to those for whom Ezekiel wrote, as leaders of the party that was "always devising mischief," in opposition, *i.e.*, to Jeremiah and the true prophets. Possibly the meanings of the names Jaazaniah (equivalent to "God hearkens") the son of Azur (equivalent to "The Helper"), Pelatiah (equivalent to "God rescues") the son of Benaiah (equivalent to "God builds"), are chosen as with a grim irony. The name of Azur meets us in Jer. xxviii. 1 as that of the father of the false prophet Hananiah. The death of Pelatiah was probably an historical event to which the prophet pointed as a warning to those who, either at Jerusalem or among the exiles, were speaking as he spoke.

Ver. 3.—It is not near, etc. The words take their place among the popular, half-proverbial sayings of which we have other examples in ch. viii. 12; ix. 9; and xviii. 2. As in most proverbs of this kind, the thought is condensed to the very verge of obscurity, and the words have received very different interpretations. (1) That suggested by the Authorized Version. "It (the judgment of which the true prophets spoke) is not near. Let us build houses, not, as Jeremiah bids (xxix. 5), in the land of exile, but here in Jerusalem, where we shall remain in safety. Are we threatened with the imagery of the 'seething pot' (Jer. i. 13)? Let us remember that the caldron protects the meat in it from the fire. The walls of the city will protect us from the army of the Chaldeans." The temper which clothed itself in this language was that of the self-confident boastful security of Jer. xxviii. 3; and the death of Hananiah, the son of Azur, in that history presents a parallel to that of Pelatiah in this. (2) Grammatically, however, the rendering of the Revised Version is preferable: *The time is not near for building houses;* probably, as before, with a reference to Jeremiah's advice. "We," they seem to say, "are not come to that point yet. We will trust, as in (1), in our interpretation of the caldron." (3) On the whole, I incline, while adopting the Revised Version rendering, to interpret the words, as Smend takes them, as the defiant utterance of despair: "It is no time for building houses, here or elsewhere. We are doomed. We are destined (I borrow the nearest analogue of modern proverbial speech) 'to stew in our own juice.' Well, let us meet it as we best may." I find what suggests this view (1) in the improbability that the thought of the caldron could ever have been received as a message of safety (comp. ch. xxiv. 3, 6); and (2) in the despairing tone of most of the sayings that Ezekiel records (xviii. 2; xxxvii. 11). Probably there were, as in other like crises in the history of nations (say, *e.g.*, in those of the Franco-German War) rapid alternations between the two moods of boastful security and defiant despair—the *galgenhumor*, the courage of the gallows, as Smend calls it; and the same words might be uttered now in this temper, and now in that. In either case, there was the root-element of the absence of repentance and submission.

Vers. 4, 5.—The prophet still, we must remember, in his vision, is bidden to do his work as a true prophet, and to rebuke the defiant speech which he had heard. As in ch. ii. 2, the Spirit of Jehovah comes upon him, and throws him into the prophetic ecstasy. It is noticeable that here, as in ch. ii. 3, his message is not to Judah only, but to the whole house of Israel as represented by those to whom he spoke. I know the things. This, as ever, was one of the notes of a true prophet, that he shared, as was needed for his work, in the knowledge of him from whom no secrets are hid (John ii. 24, 25; Matt. ix. 4; 1 Cor. xiv. 25). Thoughts, as well as words, were laid bare before him, as they were to his Lord (Heb. iv. 12).

Ver. 7.—They are the flesh, etc. The prophet is led to retort their derisive or defiant words. Not they, but the carcases of their victims, were as the "flesh" in the "caldron." For themselves, there was another fate in reserve. Neither to be protected by the caldron nor to meet their doom in it, but to be brought out of it. Death, by famine, sword, or pestilence (ch. v. 12), might be the doom of some, but for others, perhaps specially for those whom the prophet addresses, there would be captivity first, and death from the sword which they feared, afterwards.

Ver. 9.—The strangers are, of course, the Chaldean invaders, and the prediction finds its fulfilment in the massacre of the princes of Judah at Riblah (Jer. lii. 9, 10), which was in Hamath, the northern border of Israel (1 Kings viii. 65; 2 Kings xiv. 25). Then they should see that their defiant speech as to the "caldron" and "the flesh" would be of no avail. Thus they should know that the prophet had spoken in the name of Jehovah, and that their punishment by the heathen was the righteous retribution for their having walked in the ways of the heathen.

Ver. 13.—Pelatiah the son of Benaiah. We must remember that this was part of the vision, but it may be assumed, in the nature of the case, that it represented what then or afterwards was a fact in history. Had Pelatiah died suddenly during a council meeting? Compare the death of Hananiah in Jer. xxviii. 17. As it was, even in the vision, the death so startled and horrified the prophet, that he burst out again into a prayer like that of ch. ix. 8. Was the "residue," the "remnant" of Israel, represented by one of the chief counsellors of the city, to be thus cut off?

Ver. 14.—The answer to that question comes as by a new inspiration from the word of the Lord.

Ver. 15.—The men of thy kindred, etc. The full force of the phrase can hardly be understood without remembering that the word for "kindred" implies the function and office of a *goel*, the redeemer and avenger of those among his relations who had suffered wrong (Lev. xxv. 25, 48; Numb. v. 8), and the point of the revelation is that Ezekiel is to find those who have this claim on him, his true "brethren," not only or chiefly in his natural relations in the priesthood, but in the companions of his exile (the LXX., following a different reading, gives, "the men of the Captivity"), and the whole house of Israel, who were in a like position, who were condemned by those who had been left in Jerusalem. As in Jeremiah's vision (xxiv. 1), they were the "good figs;" those in the city, the vile and worthless. They were the remnant, the residue, for whom there was a hope of better things. They were despised as far off from the Lord. They were really nearer to his presence than those who worshipped in the temple from which Jehovah had departed. Ewald and Smend take the words as indicative: "Ye are far," etc.

Ver. 16.—Yet will I be unto them as a little sanctuary; better, with the Revised Version, *a little while*, as marking that the state described was transient and provisional. For a time, Ezekiel and the exiles were to find the presence of Jehovah manifested as in the vision of Chebar (ch. i. 4—28), or felt spiritually, and this would make the spot where they found themselves as fully a holy place as the temple had been. There also they would have a "house of God." But this was not to be their permanent lot. There was to be a restoration to "the land of Israel" (ver. 17; ch. xxxvii. 21), to the visible sanctuary, to a second temple no longer desecrated by the pollutions that had defiled the first. As with all such prophecies, the words had "springing and germinant accomplishments." In ch. xl.—xlviii. we have Ezekiel's ideal vision of their fulfilment. A literal but incomplete fulfilment is formed in the work of restoration achieved by Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and the hopes then cherished by Haggai and Zechariah. A more complete but less literal fulfilment appears in the Church of Christ as the true Israel of God (Gal. vi. 16), and in the Jerusalem which is above (Gal. iv. 26). In the fact that in the seer's vision of that heavenly city there is no temple, but the presence of "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. xxi. 22), we find the crowning development of Ezekiel's thought. Intermediate expansions are found (1) in the gradual substitution of the synagogue for the temple in the religious life of Israel; (2) in our Lord's words to the woman of Samaria (John iv. 21—24); and (3) in his promise that where two or three are gathered together in his Name, there he would be in the midst of them (Matt. xviii. 20). The thought that it is the presence of Jehovah that makes the sanctuary, not the sanctuary that secures the presence, Ezekiel may have learnt from the fate of Shiloh (Ps. lxxviii. 60).

Ver. 17.—I will give you the land of Israel. The marginal references in the Authorized Version show how entirely Ezekiel was following in the footsteps of his master Jeremiah, as he had done in those of Isaiah, in their prophecies of restoration. Here also the law of "springing and germinant accomplishments" finds its application. Ezekiel (xlvii. 13—xlviii. 35) has his ideal of a new geographical Israel, as of a new local temple, a land from which idolatrous shrines and high places have disappeared. St. Paul (Rom. ix.—xi.) clings to the thought of a restoration of the literal Israel, even while he strips it of Ezekiel's geographical limitations.

Ver. 19.—I will give them one heart. The LXX., following a different reading, gives "another heart" (as in 1 Sam. x. 9); but the Hebrew, represented by the Authorized and Revised Versions, is, without any doubt, right. As in the symbolic action of the joining of the two sticks in ch. xxxvii. 15—22, so here, the hope of the prophet, like that of Isaiah and Jeremiah (xxxii. 37—39), looked forward to the unity of the restored people. Judah should no longer vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim Judah (Isa. xi. 13). The long-standing line of cleavage should disappear. Oneness of purpose and of action would characterize the new Israel of God. So, in our Lord's prayer for his Church, there is the prayer that "they may be one"—made perfect in one (John xvii. 21—23). Left to itself, Israel tended, as all human communities have tended, to an ever-subdividing individualism, fruitful in sects and parties and schisms. Even the highest of those aspirations has remained as yet without any adequate fulfilment. The ideal unity of the Christian Church is as far distant as that of the Church of Israel. It remains for us to welcome any approximate fulfilments as pledges and earnests of the future unity of the true Israel of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. In the prophet's thoughts that unity was to be brought about by the Divine gift of a "new Spirit," loyal, obedient, unselfish. We note how distinctly, whether consciously or unconsciously, Ezekiel reproduces the thought, almost the very words, of Jer. xxxi. 31—33; xxxii. 37—39; how his words are in their turn reproduced in Rev. xxi. 3—5. The eternal hope asserts itself again and again in spite of all partial failures and disappointments. **I will take the stony heart out of their flesh.** The thought is, as we have seen, identical with that of Jer. xxxi. 31—33, but the form in this instance is eminently characteristic of Ezekiel, and meets us again in ch. xxxvi. 26. The "stony heart" is that which is "hardened" (ch. iii. 7) against all impressions of repentance, to all natural or spiritual aspirations of the good. So Zech. vii. 12 speaks of those who had made their hearts "harder than an adamant stone." So we may remember, by way of illustration, that Burns says of the sin of impurity that "it hardens a' within," that "it *petrifies* the feeling." Ezekiel had seen enough of that stoniness in others, perhaps had, at times, felt it in himself.

Ver. 20.—That they may walk in my statutes, etc. Out of the new spirit there was to grow the new life—a life of righteousness and obedience, as in worship, so also in the acts of man's daily life and his dealings with his neighbours. So, and not otherwise, could the actual relation of Jehovah correspond to the ideal, as it had been declared of old (Exod. vi. 7; Lev. xxvi. 12;

1 Sam. xii. 22; 2 Sam. vii. 23). This, for Ezekiel, was the crowning blessedness of all, as it had been that of earlier and contemporary prophets (Hos. ii. 23; Jer. xxiv. 7). To that thought he returns again and again, as to the anchor of his hope (ch. xiv. 11; xxvii. 14; xxxvi. 28; xxxvii. 23, 27).

Ver. 21.—**But as for them, etc.** We note the peculiar phraseology. The heart of the people walks not simply after their detestable things, but after the heart of those things. There is, as it were, a central unity in the evil to which they unite themselves, just as the heart of man turns to the heart of God when the two are in their ideal relation to each other. For those who did this, whether in Jerusalem or among the exiles, there was the prospect of a righteous retribution. The words close the message which Ezekiel heard in the courts of the temple in his visions, but which he was to deliver (ver. 25) to them of the Captivity.

Vers. 22, 23.—Another stage of the departure of the Divine glory closes the vision. It had rested over the middle of the city It now halts over the mountain on the east side of the city, *i.e.* on the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. xv. 30; Zech. xiv. 4). Currey mentions, but without a reference, a Jewish tradition that the Shechinah, or glory-cloud, remained there for three years, calling the people to repentance. What is here recorded may have suggested the thought of Zech. xiv. 4. We may remember that it was from this spot that Christ "beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke xix. 41); that from it He, the true Shechinah, ascended into heaven. Here, perhaps, the dominant thought was that it remained for a time to direct the work of judgment. And so the vision was over, and the prophet was borne back in vision to Chaldea, and made known to the exiles of Tel-Abib the wonderful and terrible things that he had seen.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*The false confidence of unbelief.* Jeremiah told the captives to settle in the land of exile and build houses there, because the Captivity was to last for generations (Jer. xxix. 5). But the frivolous people have rejected that wise counsel, and they declare that such provision for exile is not necessary. "It is not time to build these houses the prophet spoke of," they say; "we will stay in the city, like the flesh in the cauldron."

I. IMPENITENCE CREATES FALSE CONFIDENCE. This is to be expected, just as we see, on the other hand, that a deep sense of guilt brings with it a fear of judgment to come. When we feel and own our sin, we must admit that we deserve punishment, and we must see that the ground of assurance is cut from beneath our feet. What right have we to believe that God will shield us from harm, while we are bidding defiance to his Law? But while a soul is impenitent the ill desert and threatening doom are not perceived. It does not own that it should be punished. It defends itself and shelters itself behind innumerable excuses. Moreover, the moral sense is now blunt, and the faculty of spiritual insight blind. The messenger of God, too, is regarded as an enemy, and therefore little attention is given to his word. Thus arises a meretricious faith, the opposite of true faith, the confidence of unbelief.

II. FALSE CONFIDENCE POSTPONES AND MINIMIZES THE PROSPECT OF CALAMITY. 1. *It postpones.* Possibly the evil day may lie in the future. This much is tacitly admitted. But it is so far away that we need not give any consideration to it. While the prophet declares that it is at the door, the reckless unbeliever relegates it to a region of dim futurity beyond the horizon of practical considerations. 2. *It minimizes.* Even if it is admitted that the dreadful day is near, the evil of it is made little of. "There is no need to build houses," these "Jerusalem sinners" exclaim. The storm may come soon, but it will quickly pass. Thus men make the least of the prospect of future punishment. False confidence first postpones the consideration of it, and then softens its terrors. To the impenitent sinner hell is first a far-off possibility; then, though it is a nearer future, it is not thought to be so unendurable as the preachers declare.

III. THERE IS GREAT DANGER IN FALSE CONFIDENCE. The Jews were simply deceiving themselves. Their very language should have revealed their folly to them. They described the city as a cauldron in which they were as the flesh. Their only application of this metaphor was to represent themselves as well inside the city, and therefore as not needing to build *other* houses. But the prophet did not have to go far afield to find another very obvious application of the same metaphor. The cauldron is to be set on a fire, and the flesh is only placed in it to be seethed. The cauldron, therefore, symbolizes a very dreadful fate (ver. 7). The danger is not the less because we close our eyes to it. Meanwhile a false confidence hinders the impenitent from fleeing from the impending calamity and seeking a place of refuge. Light views of sin and judgment to come lull the careless into a fatal sleep.

Ver. 5.—*God's knowledge of man's thought.* I. THE FACT. We know a few men; God knows all. None are so obscure, or remote, or secretive as to hide from him. We know the exterior life; God knows the life within—every thought, and wish, and dream, and fancy. We know in part and with many obscurities, having to piece together scattered hints, and possibly falling into great blunders in our estimation of our neighbours. God knows completely and without possibility of error, searching into the deep secrets of the heart, not setting down aught in malice, but also not blinded to sad truths by the partiality of an imperfect love. 1. *God knows our ideas.* He sees when we are in error, observes the crooked course of our ill-trained thinking, and notes the narrowness of our notions. He also knows the true thought which is not understood by our fellow-men. 2. *He knows our desires.* If he does not grant them, it is not because he is ignorant of them. Before a prayer is out of our lips the wish of it has reached the mind of God. When we cannot find words to express the longing of our souls, those vague, dumb desires are exactly measured and fully comprehended by God. God knows our evil desires, the wicked wishes that have not yet found vent in wicked deeds. 3. *He knows our sorrows.* Though the heart only knoweth its own bitterness among men, the sympathetic knowledge of God has gauged it to the bottom. No one can say, "My grief is quite beyond comprehension." No one can be utterly misunderstood. Misjudged by man, the martyr is known to God. 4. *God knows our sin.* There is no secret place where a deed of wrong can be done without the eye of God seeing it. Abel is murdered in the field, but still his blood cries to God for vengeance.

II. ITS CONSEQUENCES. 1. *Hypocrisy is a mistake.* It only hides our shame from the less important spectators, while the all-seeing eye of God regards it as an addition to the guilt which lurks beneath. 2. *Postponement of punishment is no guarantee for escape.* The criminal who is not caught red-handed hopes that he will now elude the vigilance of the ministers of justice, and the longer he remains undetected the more confident does he grow in the assurance that he will never be caught, until long years of immunity almost beget a feeling of innocence. But if God knows all, there is no escape from his anger behind the obscuring growth of years. 3. *God's long-suffering is manifest.* The heathen might say, "My God does not strike me, because he has not discovered my offence." But when the omniscience of God is admitted, his forbearance is seen to be a wonder of patience and love. He knows all, and yet he is still ready to pardon, still waiting to be gracious, nay, even still heaping upon his sinful children many favours! 4. *There is hope of salvation.* If our escape lay only in our concealment of guilt, there would always be a danger of ruin through discovery. The criminal who has no better hope than this is standing on thin ice. But now we see that God knows the worst of us, and yet offers pardon and reconciliation through the gift of his Son, we have the greatest encouragement to accept his grace. Moreover, since he knows our troubles, hopes, fears, aspirations, and difficulties, he can send the exact help we need.

Ver. 16.—*The sanctuary of the exile.* The Jews of Jerusalem boasted themselves in their temple, but with a false confidence, for that splendid edifice was to be razed. On the other hand, the poor exiles of Babylon looked upon their state of separation from Jerusalem as involving a loss of the privileges of the sanctuary. Daniel prayed with his window open towards Jerusalem, as though God were still to be sought in the sacred city (Dan. vi. 10). But Ezekiel gives the captives the assurance that God will be their Sanctuary during the short time of exile in the distant land of their captivity.

I. GOD IS THE BEST SANCTUARY. No Solomon can arise by the banks of the Chebar to build a new temple. The splendour of Lebanon and the skill of Hiram, together with the wealth and devotion of the Jewish nation at the height of its glory, produced a wonder of the world, which a feeble band of heart-broken captives could never dream of equalling. Yet the sorrow-stricken remnant of pious Israel were to have something better than gilded walls and cedar pillars. They were to have God as their Sanctuary. 1. *God vouchsafes his presence to his people.* He does not only give a house of worship;

he comes himself. 2. *God's presence sanctifies.* It is a sanctuary. The place where Moses stood before the burning bush was "holy ground," for God was there (Exod. iii. 5). Chaldea was far from the "Holy Land;" yet if God were there he would make light in the centre of heathen darkness. Wherever God visits us he makes a sanctuary. The workshop is a holy place when God is in it. 3. *God's presence saves.* The temple was regarded with a false confidence and a foolish superstition as a charmed asylum, but the event proved the delusiveness of such an assumption. When God is with us anywhere, however, we are safe; for he is "a Sun and a Shield."

II. THIS SANCTUARY IS TO BE FOUND IN EXILE. 1. *In exile from the native land.* The colonist far removed from the home and Church of his fathers, may find God in the bush or on the prairie. Though no "place of worship" may be within his reach, he need not feel banished from gracious influences. If his heart turn to God, God will be with him as his Sanctuary. 2. *In exile from the old delights.* When trouble comes, a man is, as it were, driven from the land flowing with milk and honey out into a waste howling wilderness. But One is with him, and the God who met the poor fugitive Jacob will make a Bethel in the desert of trouble. 3. *In exile from heaven.* We seek another country. Here we are pilgrims and strangers; our citizenship is in heaven. Nevertheless, God is with us here and now to train and guard and cheer us with the sanctuary of his presence. 4. *For a short season.* God would be the Sanctuary in exile "for a little time," not because he would soon desert the banished, but because he would bring them home again. If God is with us in trouble, he will bring us out of trouble. He is with us here for a season, that he may lead us to be with him in heaven for ever. Christ came into exile from heaven to be with us here on earth that he might bring us back to God. He "tabernacled with us," was our Sanctuary in exile during his earthly ministry. Now he has gone to prepare a place for us in the eternal home.

Ver. 17.—*Restoration and reunion.* I. THE DIVINE PRESENCE SECURES FUTURE SALVATION. The promise that God will be with his children in exile "as a Sanctuary" (ver. 16) is immediately followed by the assurance that he will bring them back to their land. It is not for nothing, then, that the poor exiles have the Sanctuary that is better than Solomon's splendid temple—God's very presence. If God is with us, the future is ours. God is not only a Stay and a Comfort to-day, he holds the key of to-morrow. Therefore God only needs to be a Sanctuary for "a little while." Our light affliction "endureth but for a moment." The presence of God should make the hardship of the moment doubly endurable, first because of its own immediate help, and secondly on account of the cheering prospects it opens out. The light of such a future should throw back rays of comfort into the darkest experience.

II. THE FUTURE SALVATION IS TO BE A GREAT RESTORATION. God will bring the exiles home again. This implies two things. 1. *Deliverance from evil.* The Jews were scattered among heathen peoples whose alien temper and domineering spirit were sources of trouble; *e.g.* Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Sin plunges us into hurtful conditions. For wholesome discipline God's true people may be thrown into circumstances of persecution and peril. But this will not be for ever. If the Son of God is with the three in the furnace, he will deliver them from it. 2. *Restoration to the old home.* The exiles are to return to Canaan. Souls exiled from the kingdom of heaven by sin will, when pardoned and renewed (see ver. 19), be restored to the privileges which were the birthright of all—for all have been children, and "of such is the kingdom of heaven." Further, those who have been thus far restored may well feel the need of a more perfect recovery to the home of God, since this earth is not heaven, and here the people of God are "pilgrims and strangers" seeking "another country, that is, a heavenly." God's perfect restoration includes the bringing of his children home to heaven.

III. THE GREAT RESTORATION INCLUDES PERFECT REUNION. The nation was scattered; the promise is that it shall be reunited. Sin divides; redemption unites. All evil has a disintegrating influence on national and family life. Its root is selfishness, and selfishness implies severance. But love is the source of the better life, and love is the closest bond of union. 1. *National reunion.* So with the Jew. A nation will be safe against internal strife when Christian principles are followed. 2. *The reunion of* *mankind.* War is a vast and hideous fruit of selfish sinful passions and narrow hard-heartedness. Christianity, if triumphant, would kill war by uniting the nations in brotherhood, thus bringing "peace on earth." 3. *The reunion of individuals.* In restoration to God we learn patience, sympathy, and charity in regard to our fellow-men. 4. *The reunion of families.* This begins on earth in pure home love. But it will be completed in the great restoration of families when all can meet in the home beyond the grave.

Vers. 19, 20.—*The heart of flesh.* Two mistakes are commonly made by well-meaning social reformers. Too much faith is placed in external improvement, and too much power is credited to man. It is not perceived that the greatest evil is in the heart, and that the only cure can be found in the help of God. But both of these deeper truths are recognized in the passage before us.

I. THE NATURE OF THE GREAT CHANGE. Ver. 17 had promised an external restoration; now we have the assurance of an internal transformation. It is the heart that is to be changed. The very centre of the being must be renewed. For this David prayed (Ps. li. 10). The need of it was pointed out to Nicodemus by Christ (John iii. 3). Note the characteristics of the new heart. 1. *Unity.* "One heart." The internal discord will cease. A man with divided affections is like a two-hearted monster. But doubtless the unity here referred to is social. Sin having brought quarrels among men, the new state will be one of harmony. 2. *Life.* The old heart was of stone, and therefore dead. The new heart is of flesh, and living. Sin deadens the soul. The death of sin is the resurrection of the better nature. 3. *Susceptibility.* The stony heart cannot feel. This is the dangerous result of sin. The conscience is seared. The guilt of sin and its danger are not felt. The appeals of Divine grace are unheeded. Tears are wasted on a marble statue. Rain and sunshine cannot fertilize a granite rock. But the new heart is tender. As when Moses strikes the rock the streams flow, so when God's Word reaches the stony heart with the power of his Spirit a new feeling is awakened. 4. *Naturalness.* The new heart is of flesh, not of some rare ethereal substance. The Christian is not to have the heart of an angel, but just a man's true natural heart. The Christian is the true man. Christianity is in harmony with nature. Inhumanity is unnatural. The lack of natural affections is a sign of unspirituality. Cold saintliness is not an effect of God's grace, but a product of man's perversity. God puts a heart of flesh in the flesh. Thus there is harmony, and all is natural.

II. THE SOURCE OF THE GREAT CHANGE. God promises to effect this wonderful transformation. Only he can do it. We can change our clothes, our habitation, our outward manners, but not our hearts. The depth of the change renders it too much for man. So does the previous condition of those on whom it has to be wrought. As the heart is of stone, it is too cold to feel its need, and too dead to strive after a better condition. In this hardness and indifference the hapless condition of the sinner is completed. Even the penitent cannot create in himself a clean heart. But left to himself, man is not likely to become penitent. Now, God promises to do what man can never accomplish for himself. He will take away the old evil—remove the heart of stone. He will give a new nature—the heart of flesh. He will also inspire power into this new nature by putting "a new spirit" in his children. This is done by the gift of his Holy Spirit.

III. THE RESULTS OF THE GREAT CHANGE. This change takes place in the heart; it is inward, and therefore secret. But its consequences cannot be hidden, for out of the heart are "the issues of life." No one can have the heart of flesh and behave like a being of stone—cold, unsympathetic, inactive. Two consequences are noticed. 1. *Obedience.* The heart of flesh is given that God's people may walk in his statutes and keep his ordinances and do them. We cannot truly obey God till we love him. When the heart is right with God the most natural result is that the conduct should be right also. Yet, be it observed, this is not to be regarded as a merely necessary result of God's action within us, for ver. 20 describes a purpose rather than a certain result. God gives a heart of flesh "*that*" his people "may walk," etc. It is still left with them to exert themselves in the way of obedience. 2. *Adoption.* "Thy seed shall be my people, and I will be their God." God owns his renewed people as his children; they own him as their Father. The right heart is at one with God.

Ver. 25.—*Preaching to the captives.* I. THE PREACHER MUST START FROM A REVE-

LATION MADE TO HIMSELF. The prophets were seers. The apostles were eye-witnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. No preacher can go forth with God's Word unless he has first received that Word. For it is not his business to gather congregations merely to hear his "guesses at truth," nor is he called to set before men his most profound speculations, if those speculations are only wrought out of his own ideas. He is a messenger—therefore he must bear a message; a herald—therefore he must have a gospel to proclaim. Where shall the modern preacher find his Divine word? He cannot pretend to be an Ezekiel at home among the cherubim, to whom the inmost wheels of the Divine mysteries seemed to be revealed. Nevertheless, he has his revelations: 1. *In the Bible.* Of all men the preacher is called to be a diligent student of this rich storehouse of revelation. The modern preacher does not see Ezekiel's cherubim, but he can read the New Testament, of which Ezekiel knew nothing; and the gospel story of Jesus of Nazareth is a greater revelation than the visions of an Old Testament prophet. 2. *In experience.* Every preacher must have his own vision of Scripture truth. We can only speak what we have seen and heard. The truth must be interpreted by experience.

II. THE PRIVATE REVELATION OF TRUTH IS GIVEN FOR PUBLIC DECLARATION. Ezekiel might have thought himself a rarely privileged soul, and have considered his visions as choice mysteries to be kept secret, and not to be wasted on unsympathetic ears, like pearls cast before swine, if he had not understood his duty as a prophet of Israel too well to make such a mistake. Freely he had received, freely he must give. All who know God's truth are under sacred obligations to do what in them lies to declare that truth. It is not possible for every one to be a preacher by word of mouth. Still, in some way missionary enterprise should follow the reception of Divine truth. We who have the gospel are bound to give it to those to whom it is yet an undreamed secret. 1. This declaration is to be *unreserved.* Ezekiel spoke all the things. Some were obscure; some might cause offence; some might be abused. Yet he was not at liberty to hold back anything. The preacher must not shun to "declare the whole counsel of God." 2. This declaration is *for all.* It was given to Ezekiel's neighbours, the captives, without distinction. As there are no esoteric truths in God's revelation, so there is no spiritual aristocracy of the initiated. The only limit is our capacity to receive. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

III. THE DECLARATION OF DIVINE TRUTH IS ESPECIALLY NEEDED BY THOSE WHO ARE IN TROUBLE. Ezekiel "spake unto them of the Captivity." 1. It is a peculiarly Christian duty to bring the consolation of God to the *troubled.* This is suited to the sorrowful. Lighter thoughts may amuse in hours of ease. But when darkness gathers about the soul, nothing short of the deep verities of God will satisfy. Those verities may not be always pleasant. Much that Ezekiel saw filled him with distress. Still God's truth is all wholesome and healing, and his last words are his best, as Ezekiel's hearers must have found when the prophet concluded with the wonderful promise of the "heart of flesh" (ver. 19). 2. The gospel is peculiarly appropriate for those who are *spiritually captives,* i.e. in bondage to (1) superstition, (2) doubt, (3) fear, or (4) sin. Christ came to proclaim liberty to such captives (Luke iv. 15).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 2.—*Evil counsellors.* Ezekiel was a true patriot; and it was accordingly to him matter of great distress that his countrymen were misled by ungodly and self-seeking counsellors and princes. "If gold rust, what shall iron do?" If those occupying positions of authority and eminence are unfaithful, what can be expected of the multitude, who go as they are led? By whatever name they are called, and to whatever gifts or acquirements they owe their influence, there will always, in every state and in every Church, be men who lead, who guide the thoughts and control and inspire the actions of their fellows and inferiors. It was the prophet's sorrow to see posts of power at Jerusalem occupied by those who led the citizens astray and encouraged them in their rebellion against God. His experience and reflections lead us to think of great men who are at the same time counsellors of evil in the community.

I. THE COUNSELLORS OF A NATION OWE THEIR POSITION AND INFLUENCE TO GIFTS AND ACQUIREMENTS FOR WHICH THEY ARE INDEBTED TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

II. SUCH POSITION AND INFLUENCE ARE NECESSARILY ACCOMPANIED BY GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY.

III. THE COUNSELLORS OF A NATION ABUSE THEIR TRUST WHEN THEY SEEK TO DIRECT PUBLIC POLICY SO AS TO SECURE PERSONAL AND PRIVATE ENDS. That this is often done no student of political philosophy and history, no observer of contemporary politics in any nation, can doubt. Men profess zeal for the public good, and upon such profession are exalted, by the favour of a prince or of the public, to positions of eminence and power. No sooner are they securely in office than they make use of their newly acquired power to gain some ends dear to their own interests, passions, or prejudices. Some by oppression or peculation amass great wealth; some find means to revenge themselves upon their enemies and rivals; some seek to get into their own hands the reins of supreme power; some regard office as the opportunity for advancing their family or their friends to posts of consideration and emolument. In public such persons speak of patriotism, of popular rights, of disinterested devotion to the public good. But in reality they are always scheming to secure some advantage to themselves. So much is this the case in certain communities that among them the "politician" is loathed and despised by all men of integrity and honour.

IV. EVIL COUNSELLORS ARE ACTUATED BY BASE MOTIVES. Politicians are sometimes in the pay of their country's enemies; they are sometimes the instruments of a despot who seeks to rob the people of their rights, and to establish a tyranny; they are sometimes indifferent to their fellow-countrymen's sufferings, if only they themselves may profit by their nation's fall. Self is their rule, their impulse, their one consideration. What they do they do not as unto the Lord, but unto men.

V. EVIL COUNSELLORS LEAD A COMMUNITY INTO ERROR AND RUIN. The multitude ever follows the guidance of the few. The uninstructed and ill-informed are at the mercy of their superiors. Old Testament history abounds with instances of misleading by unprincipled rulers. It is mentioned to the condemnation of one and another of the kings that they "caused Israel to sin." And what was true of the "chosen nation" is true of every people; at some epoch or other the pride, the vanity, the ambition, the meanness, or the selfish sloth of those in authority has led the nations into some course of infatuated folly, and the people have suffered for the offences of their leaders.

VI. RETRIBUTION WILL SURELY OVERTAKE SUCH AS BY WICKED COUNSEL LEAD THE PEOPLE ASTRAY. The time must come when the secret purposes of wicked rulers will be brought to light and exposed. Some are hurled by the indignation of the people from the lofty position to which they have been allowed to climb. Some retain their position whilst they live, but their memory is accursed. But of all we are assured upon the highest authority that they shall be brought into judgment, and that their deeds shall not be unpunished.—T.

Ver. 3.—*Judgment deferred.* The evil counsellors of Jerusalem did their worst to counteract the effect of the message which the Lord's prophets were commissioned to communicate. Thus it came to pass that the inhabitants of the city were encouraged to neglect the obvious duties of repentance and supplication; and, when the time of judgment came, were found unprepared. The means by which the devisers of mischief brought about this result are described in this passage. They induced the citizens to believe that, if the threatened judgment were ever to come, it would not be yet, not probably in their time; and encouraged the citizens to build houses, and to live as if no catastrophe were about to befall them. If the ruin of Jerusalem were appointed, at all events that ruin was "not near."

I. THE WAY IN WHICH SINNERS TREAT THE THREATS OF GOD'S AUTHORIZED MINISTERS. 1. It is often the bounden duty of faithful messengers of God to foretell the approach of chastisement and judgment. A painful duty it always is; and it is to be feared that on this account many shrink from discharging it. Even the tender and gracious Jesus now and again denounced the sins of the self-righteous and hypocritical, and warned such that condemnation awaited them. No one can carry out the office of a minister of righteousness who does not remind the unbelieving and impenitent that "the wages of sin is death." 2. It is observable that such admonitions are often treated with neglect and contempt. It has been thus from the time of Noah, whose warnings were unheeded and ridiculed by his contemporaries. The admonitions of Christ himself in some instances only embittered the hostility of those whom he reproached. Every servant of God has had occasion to exclaim, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

II. THE ERROR WHICH SINNERS COMMIT IN SO TREATING GOD'S MESSAGE. 1. Many who hear the warnings and threats addressed to them give no credit to what they hear, and do not expect the predictions to be fulfilled. They have more confidence in their own judgment and in their own good fortune than in the Word of the Lord. They do not wish to believe, and they will not believe. 2. Many who do not absolutely disbelieve and reject the message, nevertheless persuade themselves that its fulfilment will be indefinitely deferred, and indeed is altogether uncertain. Such seems to have been the case with the evil counsellors, whose guidance was accepted in Jerusalem. Their answer to every prediction of calamity was this: "It is not near!" It is with the same excuse that the Word of God is so constantly encountered in our own days; and there are those who may not make this excuse in words, who yet cherish it in their hearts and act upon it in their conduct. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

III. THE FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS OF SUCH TREATMENT OF GOD'S MESSAGE. What shall be said of the attitude of those whose one reply is this: "It is not near"? 1. They must be reminded that time, after all, is of comparatively little importance. The main question for us is this—Is God angry with the wicked? Is his wrath to be revealed against the ungodly? If it is so, then how can we attach great importance to the question—Will this be made manifest this year or next year; now or at some future time? 2. They must be reminded that the judgment foretold may be actually nearer than is supposed or believed. It was so in the case of Jerusalem in the time of Ezekiel. It has often been so. Men have been eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, when sudden destruction has come upon them. 3. They must be reminded that, near or far, the judgment of the Supreme Ruler is inevitable. "Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?"—T.

Ver. 5.—*Divine omniscience.* Among the many elements of that superiority which is distinctive of monotheism over polytheism must be noted the perfect knowledge which the one God possesses of all the creatures whom he has made. Men who believe in the "gods many" of the heathen have not, and cannot have, that constant sense of the Divine omniscience which must exercise so signal an influence for good over the worshipper of the Supreme.

I. THE REASONABLENESS OF THIS DOCTRINE. We attribute to the Deity infinite perfection; and this is not consistent with the limitation of his knowledge. It is absurd to suppose that he who has made the mind of man has lost the power of recognizing the thoughts and intents of the heart which he fashioned by his power and wisdom. There is no part of his universe in which God is not present. Much more evidence is it that the Father of the spirits of all flesh is in possession of every secret of the intellectual and spiritual nature of man.

II. THE FORGETFULNESS OF THIS DOCTRINE. It is evident that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and especially the false teachers and evil counsellors in the city, lost sight of this great truth. God was not in all their thoughts. It may not have occurred to them, as they pursued their selfish plans and lived their irreligious life, that every purpose and hope was known to the Divine Lord and Judge. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

III. THE TERROR WHICH THIS DOCTRINE SHOULD HAVE FOR EVIL-DOERS WHO ARE REMINDED OF IT. God knows the wicked things that come into men's minds and are encouraged to abide there—the injustice, the covetousness, the falsehood, the impurity, the cruelty, the hatred, the malevolence, which are distinctive of those who depart from God. Such qualities, even before they find expression in word and act, are repugnant to the nature of the just and holy God. And he is not simply an observer; he is a Judge. He disapproves and condemns thoughts, sentiments, and purposes which are in opposition to his own laws, to his own character. He has revealed his intention to bring men into judgment for all their conduct, and for every secret thing, good or bad. From this reckoning with the Judge of all there is no escape. The prospect may well strike the impenitent sinner with dismay.

IV. THE DISSUASIVE POWER WHICH THIS DOCTRINE SHOULD EXERCISE OVER THOSE WHO ARE HESITATING WHETHER OR NOT TO YIELD TO TEMPTATION. In order to resist temptation to sin, it is not enough to guard our actions, to order aright our circumstances and associations. It is in the *mind* that the real battle must be fought. And upon this battle-field, what auxiliary is so potent and effectual as the remembrance of the Lord's omniscience? He is with us to assist us in the regulation of our thoughts and desires; for he knows alike the force of temptation, and the sincerity of our endeavour to check and to overcome it.

V. THE WELCOME GIVEN BY GOD'S PEOPLE TO THIS DOCTRINE. The same truth is a joy and consolation to the Christian, which the ungodly man finds an occasion of distress and dread. Why is this? It is because God has in Christ made himself known to his heart as his Friend and Father. Thus openness and confidence and holy intimacy prevail between the Christian and his God. The faithful servant of God knows his infirmities and his faults, and he is grateful to be assured that these are known to his Father in heaven, who will deal leniently and compassionately with them, and will assist him in overcoming them. God knows the aspirations and endeavours of his own children, is interested in every effort to attain to a fuller knowledge of himself, and a more constant and practical subjection to his will. In Ps. cxxxix. the feelings of the good man, conscious of the Divine omniscience, find a full and most poetical and fervent expression. There is nothing which such a man would wish to hide from such a Friend.—T.

Ver. 13.—*Remonstrance and intercession.* It is remarkable that whilst Ezekiel was commissioned to censure and to denounce the political action of the evil counsellors of Jerusalem, he took no pleasure in the awful practical expression which the righteous Judge saw fit to give to this censure and denunciation. It was the prophet's business to expose the wicked policy of Pelatiah; but this man's death was to Ezekiel a severe shock and sorrow, calling forth from his sympathetic and patriotic heart the words in which he deprecated with all reverence and submission the displeasure of the Lord.

I. THE OCCASION OF REMONSTRANCE AND INTERCESSION. In this passage the occasion was twofold. 1. The pressure of present affliction, in the death of one of the leaders and rulers in the metropolis. 2. The apprehension of future calamity and disaster such as the present affliction foreboded. What had happened to one would, in all likelihood, happen to others. Similarly, every well-wisher to his country and his Church is, in times of trial, driven to the throne of grace for merciful forbearance and interposition.

II. THE PRESENTATION OF REMONSTRANCE AND INTERCESSION. 1. There is an identification on the part of the suppliant of himself with his people. After all, whatever might be the errors of any class of his countrymen, Ezekiel was a Hebrew, and he could not but suffer in the sufferings of his country; its misfortunes could not but afflict him; its ruin could not but humiliate and distress him. 2. There is an implicit admission of the justice of the Divine action; the prophet does not complain of what had been wrought by the hand of Divine and judicial authority. No affliction was undeserved. 3. There is supplication that ills apparently impending may be averted. As Abraham pleaded for Sodom, so Ezekiel pleaded for Jerusalem. There is but a remnant: of that remnant shall a full end be made? As if he added, in the language of the patriarch, "That be far from thee, Lord!"

APPLICATION. The Christian cannot fail to be reminded, by this passage, of the intercessory office of Christ. We have an Advocate with the Father, appointed and accepted by that Father's love. Here is our refuge and our hope in the time of calamity and under the fear of judgment. Our High Priest is a powerful and successful Intercessor. Our sins have deserved that "a full end" should be made of humanity. But through Christ mercy is extended, clemency exercised, and salvation assured to those who place themselves under the patronage and protection of the great Mediator and Advocate.—T.

Vers. 16, 17.—*Exile and restoration.* There is a change in the tone of the prophet. A full end shall not be made of the remnant. The metropolis shall fall, the king shall be led captive. The enemy shall prevail. But the children of the Captivity shall not be forgotten; they shall experience the protection and fellowship of their covenant God; and they shall be brought back to the land of Israel, when Divine purposes are fulfilled, and when the time is ripe.

I. GOD A SANCTUARY FOR A SEASON IN A FOREIGN LAND. This must have been a precious and encouraging assurance to the captives in their banishment. They loved Jerusalem, and they loved the temple. Far from the scene of their national privileges, they were yet not forsaken by the God of their fathers. 1. Every holy place has its true meaning and value from the residence in it of the Eternal. It is not the costly material of which a sanctuary is built, the labour and art with which it is decorated, the robed priesthoods who minister, or the lavish offerings and sacrifices that are presented; it is not these things that make a temple. It is the presence of God himself to receive and bless the worshippers, that endears the building to the enlightened and pious. 2. God may manifest his presence and favour in places where no sacred edifices exist. So Jacob understood, when he awoke from his slumber and his dream, and exclaimed, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not!"

"Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

Those upon the stormy deep, those in the primeval forests, those in the waterless deserts, those in the caverns of the earth, have met with God in the exercises of devotion. And he was a Sanctuary to his banished ones in their captivity in the East, as near to them as he was to those still permitted to resort to the courts of the temple at Jerusalem. "The tabernacle of God is with men." 3. Thus God's spiritual presence may be realized and enjoyed even in a world of sin. Earth is in a sense the scene of exile and of banishment. But for all that, God will be to his people a Sanctuary in the place and during the period of their captivity. His Church is his temple, and from it he never departs.

II. GOD THE RESTORER OF HIS BANISHED ONES. 1. The dispersion and banishment are appointed for a time and for a purpose. There were reasons why the sons of Abraham should be exiled from the land promised to their progenitor, the father of the faithful. It was apparent to the wisdom of God that only thus could they be preserved and delivered from the temptations, especially to idolatry, to which they had so often yielded. The discipline was severe, but it was effectual. The period of exile was not prolonged vindictively. 2. The restoration is as providential as the Captivity. The language of the text is very emphatic upon this point: "I will even gather you from the people," etc. "He deviseth means whereby his banished ones may return." It was this prospect which sustained and cheered the Hebrew people amidst disasters at home and exile abroad. The land of their fathers was their land; and in due time they were to enter and possess it. 3. The restoration of the Israelites prefigured the final salvation of all God's people. Their exile shall not last for ever. There is a better country, even a heavenly, a Jerusalem above; yonder is the promised inheritance, and the eternal abode of the blessed gathered from every land.—T.

Ver. 19.—*Spiritual transformation.* This promise is one of the most precious to be found in the Old Testament Scripture. Relating as it evidently does in this passage to the nation of Israel as a whole, it has generally been taken by Christians as having applicability to all who yield themselves to God, to be dealt with by his renewing and transforming grace.

I. THE NATURE THAT NEEDS TRANSFORMATION. This is characterized by *hardness.* It is "the stony heart" which Divine grace undertakes to soften and renew. The hard or stony heart is that which is insensible to spiritual realities, upon which neither Law nor gospel makes any impression, which resists every appeal whether of righteousness or of mercy.

II. THE POWER THAT EFFECTS THE TRANSFORMATION. The powerlessness of all human agency and endeavour is apparent. Man's influence can do much; but here is the most difficult of all problems to be solved; here is the necessity for something more than reformation—for actual renewal. Hence God, the Almighty, undertakes the work himself. He speaks here with authority, as the Being who needs no counsellor, no helper, who has infinite resources at his disposal, who exercises his own prerogative. It is not here explicitly stated what are the means he employs; but we know that they are means in harmony with the moral nature of man, that his appeal to us is an appeal of truth and love. In the Christian dispensation, the agent of transformation is the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost, and perpetually abiding in the Church, and the instrumentality employed is the gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, appropriated by the faith of the believing hearer of the Word

III. THE EFFECTS AND EVIDENCES OF THIS TRANSFORMATION. 1. Newness of spirit supersedes the old disposition to disobey and rebel. Every reader of the New Testament knows what stress is laid upon the new covenant, the new birth, the new life, newness of the spirit, etc. In fact, this verse from Ezekiel is peculiarly in harmony with the Christian dispensation and all that belongs to it. 2. Unity of heart is one form of newness; for it comes to supersede the division and opposition which prevail where God's authority is rejected and where God's Word is despised. It is our Lord's prayer concerning the members of his Church, that they "all may be one"—one in him and in the Father, and so one each with the other. 3. Sensitiveness is what is intended by the heart of flesh. The nature which God by his grace renews is a nature which responds to the love of God by gratitude, faith, and consecration. A heart delighting in what pleases God, dreading what offends him; a heart loving all whom God loves, and inspiring a life of scrupulous and hearty obedience;—such is the new heart, the heart of flesh, which is the best gift of God to his children.

"A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
My dear Redeemer's throne;
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
Where Jesus reigns alone."

T.

Ver. 20.—*Mutual possession.* This language is of frequent occurrence in Scripture, and applies to the relation between Jehovah and his chosen and covenant people Israel. It is ideal, for, as a matter of fact, the descendants of Abraham and of Jacob were constantly in rebellion against God, and alienated from him by their wicked works. Yet it was actually true of an election within the nation. And it remains for ever applicable, in strict and literal truth, to all those who receive Divine grace, acknowledge Divine authority, and rejoice in Divine communion.

I. THE OBEDIENT ARE CLAIMED AND OWNED BY GOD AS HIS PEOPLE. "They shall be my people," says the Eternal. They are his: 1. To possess. They are his property, and they bear upon them his mark. 2. To control. They are his servants, yielding themselves to him, and their powers as instruments in his service. 3. To love. God loves his own people, as a father loves his own children, as a husband loves his own wife. 4. To bless. The Lord is mindful of his own. There is nothing that is for their good which he withholds from them.

II. GOD IS CLAIMED AND OWNED BY THE OBEDIENT AS THEIR GOD. On this account: 1. They reverence him. Let others offer their adoration where they will, the Lord, say they, is our God, and him only will we serve. 2. They trust him. His ways may sometimes be dark, and his counsels perplexing; but he is theirs, and therefore they will not withdraw their confidence from him. 3. They glorify him with all their powers. To them there is no limit to their Lord's claims and authority; he has but to say, Go, and they go; Come, and they come; Do this, and it is done. 4. They hope in his promises. He has given them his word that they shall be brought to everlasting salvation; and the assurance, coming from their own covenant God, inspires them with a bright and consolatory hope. "This God is our God for ever and ever; . . . our Guide, even unto death."—T.

Ver. 25.—*The prophetic office.* In these few and simple words we have a declaration of the office and function of the inspired prophet, and in a certain sense of every true religious teacher whom God commissions to be the vehicle and conscious agent in communicating his truth, counsels, admonitions, and encouragements to men.

I. RECEPTION. The prophet and every religious teacher must come mediately or immediately into spiritual communication with the Divine Mind. 1. The *Source* from which the communication proceeds is none other than God himself. 2. The *matter* which is received is what is commonly called revelation; the thoughts and commands and purposes of the Supreme are made known to a human spirit. 3. The *vision*, the *hearing*, of the prophetic soul are made ready by Divine grace to appreciate the communication.

II. IMPARTATION. 1. Thus the prophet, the religious teacher, is a mediator, capable, on the one side, of fellowship with God, and on the other of correspondence and communion with his fellow-men. 2. There are special qualifications, by reason of which he can fulfil the commission received; he should be a man of quick intelligence, of tender sympathy, of dauntless courage, of manifest authority. 3. Yet his chief credentials are simple and moral—truthfulness, conscientiousness, and simplicity of nature and habit.—T.

Vers. 1—13.—*The summary punishment of official guilt.* As a rule, God is extremely patient towards human rebellion. He reproves and remonstrates and warns long before the executioner appears. Yet sometimes he departs from this course, by a summary act of vengeance. The penalty that follows some crimes is swift and sudden. The Chaldean nobles who laid an impious snare for Daniel were soon overtaken with judgment. When Herod accepted the profane flattery of his courtiers, he was soon consumed with inward disease. Ananias and Sapphira had scarcely completed their falsehood when the sword of the executioner fell upon them. At times God starts out of his secret place, and suddenly vindicates his outraged majesty.

I. MARK THE FLAGRANCY OF SIN IN PRIESTS AND PEOPLE. In all probability these twenty-five men were the heads, or princes, over the twenty-four courses of the priests, while Jaazaniah and Pelatiah may have held a yet higher rank in the temple. It may be that Pelatiah was high priest or ruler of the temple. Certain it is that they were "princes of the people." 1. *Their position was one of vast influence.* Their opinions would be accepted as the opinions of the people. Their example would be widely imitated. To a large extent, they would influence the life and conduct of the population. As they had the privilege of access to God, and possessed the means of knowing his will, the people would, as a matter of course, look to them for guidance. Profanity or infidelity among the chief priests would speedily infect the Hebrew flock. Hence, for *others'* sakes, it behoved them to be prudent, devout, and circumspect. 2. *They had turned Divine warning into ridicule.* This seems the only satisfactory way of explaining their boast, "We dwell securely." "This city is the cauldron, and we are the flesh." Jeremiah, who still dwelt in Jerusalem, had seen, in a vision from God, "a seething pot, and its mouth was towards the north." The heads of the priestly order had parodied *this*, had treated it as an image of self-security, instead of as an omen of danger. As if they had said, "Be it so! This city, with its bastions and gates, impregnable as brass or iron, is a cauldron, and as the flesh is safe in the cauldrons, equally so are we!" They laughed at every intimation of danger. In the teeth of a hundred warnings, in the teeth of a score of defeats and overthrows, they persisted in a conviction of safety. Like fools of other nations, they "made a mock at sin." 3. *This senseless hardihood led to aggravated crime.* One sin soon breeds a thousand others. *They*, who had the administration of justice, abused their office, and ruled with a sword of terror. Either by excessive lenity, in not repressing crime; or else by excessive tyranny, human life was held cheaply in the city. Death was a common occurrence, and excited no horror. Civic strifes abounded. The number of the slain increased, and these princes were responsible for the foul deed. *They* were the persons who "had filled the streets with the slain." The stains of human blood were upon their skirts. 4. *The exact measure of their sin was known.* Not an item in their evil deeds was unknown nor unregistered. They had tried to conceal their misdeeds, had endeavoured to minimize their offences, were attempting to persuade themselves that Jehovah did not trouble about such matters. But imagine their surprise and confusion when every iota of offence, ay, and every secret evil thought, was fully laid out in the bill of attainder. The amount and degree of each man's guilt is allotted with scrupulous exactness.

II. OBSERVE THE PROPHET'S COMMISSION. Ezekiel was employed by God to convey the last remonstrance to these princes. 1. *Elevation of mind is needed to fit men for* *reproving sin.* "The Spirit lifted me up." We live, for the most part, on such a low level of spiritual feeling, that we must be "lifted up" in order to see the real wickedness of sin, in order successfully to remonstrate with sinners. Nothing can really "lift us up" to a nobler life but the power of the Holy Ghost. 2. *Knowledge is given to men for use.* No sooner was it revealed to the prophet who were the ringleaders in the nation's sin, than at once the Spirit said to him, "Prophesy against them, O son of man." Here is work for man which the cherubim cannot do. It is the prerogative of man that he can gain access to the understanding, the judgment, the reason, the feeling, of his fellow-man. Therefore God uses men to convey his messages of grace and admonition to guilty men. All the knowledge of Divine things which we have is given us for the advantage of all. "No man liveth unto himself." 3. *Divine command and Divine strength are given at one and the same time.* When the voice said to Ezekiel, "Speak!" "the Spirit of the Lord fell upon him." Duty and ability always go together. God has never given to man a command which he was unable to obey. When God said to Moses, "Go forward!" God knew that the sea would divide at the fitting time. When Jesus said to the man with a withered hand, "Stretch it forth!" he knew that along with the effort would be imparted new strength. Some duties may appear formidable to a man who forgets the promised co-operation of Divine grace. But whenever a spirit of faith possesses a man, he can say, like Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." In a very terse prayer did an ancient Father in the Church express this truth, "Give: and then command what thou wilt." 4. *The plainest reproof is the greatest kindness to men.* Every accusation of God is laid by the prophet before these guilty men. It is a false friendship that conceals any part of the truth from our fellows, especially from relatives and kindred. Smooth words are not always the coin of affection. We read of one "whose words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords." Very wisely did David say, "Let the righteous reprove me; it shall be a kindness." It needs an abundance of wisdom, and a deep well-spring of love, to speak the whole truth to an erring friend, if we would win him back to paths of virtue and piety. The centrifugal force of duty is often greater than the centripetal force of kindness. Had Eli been more firm and faithful with his sons, he might have saved the ark of God—ay, the whole nation—from disaster. We must "speak the whole truth in love."

III. SEE THE ATTENDANT ENERGY OF GOD. "It came to pass when I prophesied, that Pelatiah *died.*" 1. *How foolish is carnal security!* Walls that seem made of brass or granite are weaker than paste-board, unless they have God behind them. Foundations built by men are built on nothingness. Belshazzar conceived himself secure because the enormous walls of Babylon were about him; yet "in the selfsame night was Belshazzar slain." God's weapons of offence can penetrate easily all the poor defences of men. 2. *Man's opportunity is brief.* It is an act of mercy that God allows *any* opportunity for escape. Such favour is seldom ever shown by an earthly king. Yet sin so blinds men that they imagine the reprieve will last for ever. It does not accord with God's wise and gracious plans to announce when the reprieve shall absolutely close. Often it closes when least expected. The day of salvation is the passing moment—the fleeting *now.* 3. *The retribution of God is sometimes summary.* Men often persuade themselves that some change of circumstance, some lengthened illness, will precede the final stroke. They lean upon a broken reed, an empty shadow. "God seeth not as man seeth." He had seen that Pelatiah had reached a climax of sin, had received this special messenger with haughty scorn, was hardening his heart under this new reproof of Ezekiel. Hence to lengthen out his day of grace was waste of mercy, was to encourage others in sin. Therefore it was better that the scene of trial should suddenly close. The Lord smote him that he died. "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

IV. MARK THE BENEVOLENT SOLICITUDE OF GOD'S SERVANT. The sudden death of Pelatiah corroborated the truth of Ezekiel's message, and vindicated his claim to be Jehovah's servant; nevertheless, in *this* Ezekiel rejoiced not. He was more concerned for his Master's glory than for his own, more anxious about Israel's well-being than his own advantage. He could consent to be set aside, exiled, slain, so long as Israel's power and fame could be restored. Such generosity of nature is the best qualification for a true servant of God. They who are most like God are the most fitted to do God's work. Moses and Paul were eminent examples of this self-disinterestedness; best of all, Jesus the Son of God.—D.

Vers. 14—21.—*Privilege: apparent or real.* Every good thing is liable to abuse, and even religion is in danger of degenerating into pernicious superstition. The outward forms often remain—even swell into exaggeration—after the inner reality has departed. So the Hebrews in olden time deemed themselves secure against evil, because they had still among them the visible temple of Jehovah. They were callous to the fact that the only value of the temple arose from its Divine Occupant. As well might one cling to a beautiful corpse when the indwelling spirit had fled.

I. EXTERNAL PRIVILEGE IS ONLY AN APPARENT GOOD. It is a channel which may convey either good or evil, fresh water or foul. It is like a rampart, which is very useful in time of battle, if only it be filled with brave soldiers; if left untenanted, it becomes of use to the enemy. The existence of the temple in Jerusalem became a snare to the Jews; it made them haughty, self-confident, boastful. In an earlier day the Jewish army deemed itself impregnable on the battle-field, because the ark of God was with them. So now the inhabitants of Jerusalem were over-confident of security, because the temple of God was there. Towards their brethren in exile they cherished an unlovely temper, a repulsive front. They imagined that because *they* had been left in the city, while others had been banished, *they* were the favourites of God, and that those removed to Babylon were removed from the favour and wing of Jehovah. Again and again had this remnant in Jerusalem been assured that they also would be removed from the city, and would die in the border of Israel; but they persistently refused to believe such distasteful warnings. Their continuance in the sacred city was an injury to their character. They were fostering the worst forms of self-conceit and self-righteousness and self-exclusiveness. They wanted to shut themselves *in*, and to shut their less-favoured brethren *out*. So they said, "Get you far from the Lord: unto us is this land given in possession."

II. THE LOSS OF EXTERNAL PRIVILEGE IS NOT NECESSARILY THE LOSS OF GOD'S PRESENCE. When men desert us, God often comes all the nearer on that account. As God had endeavoured to teach the Jews (though with little success) that his personal presence was their only security, so now he assures the dispersed of Israel that, if they desired his presence, he would be to them still a "Sanctuary." All that he had been to them aforetime in Jerusalem he could be to them in Babylon. After all, their case need not be so deplorable. Better to be in Chaldea along with God, than in Jerusalem without him. They had supposed that God had identified himself with that gorgeous temple in Jerusalem—that he was there in a sense in which he could not be elsewhere. This error must be unlearnt. Having God with us, we may have all real good.

III. SEVEREST DISASTER IS OFTEN THE CRADLE OF BLESSING. Already it began to appear that the defeat and captivity of Israel were needful, yea, were working good in the banished ones. Already the exiles had lost faith in idols, and were ashamed of their past folly. Already they found that if they returned in spirit and prayer to the true God, he would still be their substantial Friend. The faith and courage of Daniel and other young men in Babylon indicate the improvement in religious life which was budding. The presence of Ezekiel as a teacher among them was an omen for good. We have seen how (ch. viii.) the elders of Judah had sought his presence, and this, doubtless, that they might hear some word from the Lord. The sights of idolatry in that idolatrous land had probably sickened their minds and filled them with disgust. *Now* they sorrowed over lost privileges and lost opportunities. By the side of Chebar they "hung their harps in the willows," and wept. The sunshine of prosperity had spoilt their simple faith and loyalty; but in the shades of adversity they began to learn wholesome lessons. Here their character shall be re-created, their piety shall be revitalized. Earthly misfortune is heavenly discipline.

IV. THE HIGHEST GOOD IS INTERNAL. Far better to have a fortune *within* than a fortune *outside* us. This wealth is durable, abiding, inalienable. No amount of money can purchase honesty, or courage, or tender sensibility, or heart-purity. 1. *Regeneration is promised.* "I will put a new spirit within you." The stony heart shall be changed into a heart of flesh. Men are often too blind to appreciate the best possessions;

but when our judgment is enlightened, we perceive that this is the richest boon God can give or man receive. This is an inner fountain of blessing—"a well of water springing up into everlasting life." 2. *There follows a spirit of filial loyalty.* Possessing this new nature, God's Law will become a delight. The sentiment of David is reproduced in them: "Oh, how I love thy Law!" Better still; they learn to say, like Jesus, "I delight to do thy will, O God!" The path of obedience now becomes a fascination—a flowery mead or a fragrant grove. As the stars of heaven observe their proper orbits, so the new-born man spontaneously runs in the statutes of God. Obedience is no longer irksome; it is as natural as breathing, as natural as fruit-bearing. 3. *Covenant relationship.* "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." This covenant secures for the chosen ones the inalienable favour and protection of God. God obtains, by mutual treaty, a new proprietorship in these people; they, on their part, obtain a proprietorship in God. They have a claim yielded to them by Divine condescension—a claim upon God they did not possess before. 4. *National unity.* "I will give them one heart." Division had been one source of weakness in the former time. Civic rivalry had been the forerunner of national disaster. Now a better feeling shall prevail. "Judah shall not vex Ephraim, Ephraim shall not envy Judah." Union of the tribes shall be strength. 5. *On this shall follow demolition of idolatry.* "They shall take away all the detestable things." The more we know God—his Fatherhood, love, and mercy—the more we see the folly and vanity of idols. The baubles that pleased a child are despised when we become men. Our growing love to God will make us intolerant of every rival. As the burnt child dreads the fire, so the restored Hebrews abhorred idols. The man who has a clean heart desires also a clean home. Real reformation begins within—at the centre, and works outward.

V. GOD'S GOVERNMENT DEALS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL MAN. Such is the series of precious donations God engaged to bestow upon his afflicted people in exile; yet their repentance and submission was the pivot on which all good depended. If *one* here and there still clung to the old idolatry, that *one* should be excluded from all share in the nation's regeneration. His sin shall bear its proper fruit. The new covenant was to be personal as well as national; for God will not overlook the *individual* in the crowd. "Each one shall give account of himself unto God." The *one* among the guests destitute of the wedding garment was in a moment espied by the King. Not a solitary culprit shall escape the scrutiny of God's eye, nor the operation of God's Law. As the light of day penetrates every chink and corner of our globe, so the light of God's righteousness will disclose every sin of man.—D.

Vers. 1—13.—*The presumptuous security of sinners exhibited and condemned.* "Moreover the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me unto the east gate of the Lord's house," etc.

I. THE PRESUMPTUOUS AND FALSE SECURITY OF SINNERS EXHIBITED. (Vers. 1—3.) The twenty-five men here mentioned are not the same as those mentioned in ch. viii. 16: for already they have been slain in vision. In both places the number is a round one. And in this place it is clear that they were leaders of the people; for they gave counsel unto them, and two princes of the people were in the midst of them. Their conduct shows to us: 1. *Sinners boasting their security in defiance of the declarations of the Lord by his prophets.* Some of the exiles in Babylon had looked forward to a speedy return to their own land. Jeremiah the prophet sent to them a letter to correct this error, saying, "Build ye houses, and dwell in them;" and assuring them that not until they had accomplished seventy years of exile would they be permitted to return to the land of their fathers (Jer. xxix. 1—14). In the same letter he threatened those that were left at Jerusalem with "the sword, the famine, and the pestilence." And these five and twenty men, in mockery of the words of the prophet, said, "It is not near to build houses." They encouraged themselves and others in the opinion that, however it might be with the captives in Babylon, they were safe enough in Jerusalem, and need not trouble themselves about building houses. Moreover, Jeremiah had seen in vision a seething pot, or cauldron, with its face toward the north, which symbolized the coming of the kingdoms of the north against Jerusalem and against the cities of Judah, and taking them (Jer. i. 13—16). And in derision of this prophecy these twenty-five men said, "This is the cauldron, and we are the flesh." As the flesh within the cauldron is safe from the surrounding fire, so they regarded themselves as safe within their city walls, whatever forces may rage outside them. They deemed their position a secure one, and would trust to their city walls and defensive arrangements, rather than heed the words of the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In most ages there have been presumptuous and profane scoffers at the threatenings of Divine judgments (cf. 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4). And in our own age there are many who persist in sin, notwithstanding the warnings addressed to them in the sacred Scriptures. And if their own conscience also remonstrates with and warns them, they make light of its admonitions. They seem to think that they can sin on with impunity, that somehow they will escape the natural consequences of their trangressions (cf. Jer. v. 12). 2. *Sinners in influential positions forming wicked plans and proffering wicked counsel, and so misleading others.* "These are the men that devise mischief, and give wicked counsel in this city." They entered into political intrigues, and formed plans of resistance against the enemy in direct opposition to the will of God expressed by Jeremiah (xxi. 8—10; xxvii. 8—18; xxxviii. 17—23). By following this course, these five and twenty men had brought calamity and slaughter upon many whom they had misled (ver. 6). Sin, mischievous in any one, is especially mischievous in those who, by reason of their position and influence, lead others astray. When leaders in society by evil and perilous examples, or politicians or statesmen by unwise or unrighteous speeches or measures, or authors by injurious books, mislead or corrupt others, it is unspeakably pernicious. Great is the responsibility attached to great influence, and great is the guilt when that influence is exerted for evil.

II. THE PRESUMPTUOUS AND FALSE SECURITY OF SINNERS CONDEMNED. (Vers. 4—13.) Notice: 1. *The Divine knowledge of their evil designs.* "Thus saith the Lord; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them;" or, as Hengstenberg translates, "And that which riseth up in your mind I know." To the Omniscient all their thoughts and purposes were fully known (cf. Deut. xxxi. 21; Ps. cxxxix. 1—6; John ii. 24, 25; Acts i. 24; and see a homily on this verse which appears below). 2. *The disastrous consequences of their evil designs.* "Ye have multiplied your slain in this city, and ye have filled the streets thereof with the slain." At this time bloodshed and murder were terribly prevalent in Jerusalem, and were amongst the chief crimes mentioned by Ezekiel as calling for the Divine judgment upon the city and its guilty inhabitants (cf. ch. viii. 17; ix. 9). And in addition, "the slain" includes those who would be killed "by the Chaldeans, already slain from the standpoint taken up in the discourse of God." And they are said to be the slain of "the men that devise mischief," because their deaths were a consequence of their evil counsels. Who can guage the miseries that arise in every age from the evil counsels of incompetent, unprincipled, or wicked leaders of men? 3. *The fatal issue of their evil designs.* (Vers. 8—13.) Here are several points which call for brief notice. (1) The utter failure of their boasted security in the city. "I will bring you out of the midst thereof, and deliver you into the hands of strangers, and will execute judgments among you." (2) Their slaughter in the execution of the just judgment of God. "Ye have feared the sword; and I will bring a sword upon you, saith the Lord God. . . . Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel." And this prophecy was fulfilled with remarkable fidelity. After they had taken Jerusalem, the Chaldean army made prisoners of many of the chief men; they also captured King Zedekiah as he was endeavouring to escape by flight; and they carried them "to Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, to Riblah in the land of Hamath," on the northern border of Israel; and there the King of Babylon slew the princes and nobles of Judah, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in chains, to carry him to Babylon (2 Kings xxv. 18—21; Jer. xxxix. 4—7; lii. 8—11). (3) Their recognition of Jehovah as the true and supreme God when it was too late. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord" (we have noticed these words in ch. vi. 7, 10). "It is lamentable," says Hengstenberg, "if we must gain the knowledge of God by our own destruction, if he in whom we live, and move, and are, is first recognized by the strokes which break our own head. The knowledge has here, moreover, no moral import. It is a mere passive knowledge, forced upon the ungodly, unconnected with repentance." (4) The awful earnest of the fulfilment of the words of the prophet. "And it came to pass, when I prophesied, that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died." In vision Ezekiel beheld the death of Pelatiah; and it seems to us that he died, in fact when this prophecy was made known unto him. "This incident, whose awful character is attested to us by the impression upon Ezekiel, symbolizes prophetically the certainty in actual fact of the judgment of death on the others also (cf. Jer. xxviii. 17)" (Schröder). And so the issue of their presumptuous security and wicked counsel was to be their violent and ignominious death. We have in this an illustration of the issue of persistent wickedness. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "The wages of sin is death." "Sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death."

III. The sorrow of a godly man in view of God's judgments upon the wicked. "Then fell I down upon my face, and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah, Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" To Ezekiel the death of Pelatiah was an awful pledge of the death of all the others against whom he had prophesied; and it so deeply affected his spirit as to cause him to cry out thus to God (we have noticed these words on ch. ix. 8). "Sudden or great judgments do put the saints and servants of God upon humble, earnest, and argumentative prayer. Humble, 'Then fell I down upon my face;' earnest, 'and cried with a loud voice;' argumentative, 'Ah, Lord God! wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?'" (Greenhill).

Conclusion. Learn: 1. *The peril of presumption in any course which is opposed to the will of God.* 2. *The great worth to a people of wise and upright leaders.*—W. J.

Ver. 5.—*God's knowledge of our thoughts.* "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them." Hengstenberg translates, "And that which riseth up in your mind I know." The fact thus stated is—

I. Most reasonable. 1. *From the nature of God.* Grant that God is infinite, and the statement of our text must be true. Nothing can be so great as to overmatch his comprehension; nothing so small as to escape his notice. Our Lord declared the Divine interest in the smallest and lowliest things (Matt. vi. 26—30; x. 29, 30). It is unphilosophical to think that even the smallest thing is in any way unknown to him. It is limiting his knowledge. 2. *From the nature of the human mind.* (1) It is the most wonderful creation of God. Man can reflect, reason, anticipate, imagine. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." We have reason, conscience, affection, adoration. The greatness of the human mind appears very clearly when we consider its achievements. Mention some of them. Its capacity and impulse for progress also indicate its greatness. "It never rests, it has never attained, it is never perfect. Its law is progress. A point which yesterday was invisible is its goal to-day, and will be its starting-post to-morrow." (2) It is the sphere of the most wonderful operations. We see much of God in his operations in matter; *e.g.* power, wisdom, constancy. We see more of him in his operations in mind; *e.g.* more marvellous power, profounder wisdom, richer goodness. In the government of mind the righteousness, truth, and love of God are manifested. We see most of God in his dealings with sinful, disordered minds. The sin of man occasioned the most glorious display of the Divine mind and will. We see the wisdom and love of God in his method of reconciling, saving, lost men as they were never manifested before. I do not wonder, then, that God knows everything that arises in our mind, for our mind is his most wonderful creation, and his most wonderful creation disorganized, ruined; and he is engaged in saving it. How deep must be his interest in it!

II. Most wonderful. Not because of anything in God as a difficulty or hindrance to this vast and minute knowledge; but: 1. *Because of the intellectual quality of "the things that come into our mind."* How insignificant, trifling, vain, many of them are! How few really great thoughts ever rise in our mind! We know how trying it is to be compelled to listen to the trivial talk of an ill-furnished mind; to hear all the paltry details of matters in which we have no interest or concern. Yet God knows all our petty, trifling, vain thoughts. Not one of them escapes him. How wonderful! 2. *Because of the moral quality of "the things that come into our mind."* Not only are many of our thoughts insignificant and trifling, many are also mean, corrupt, and sinful. It is painful to become acquainted with the ungenerous or base thoughts and feelings of another's mind and heart. We shrink with loathing from the contemplation of the malicious or cruel designs of any one. In our own selves there is much that we would not that any one should gaze upon, or any mind know, so deeply are we ashamed of it.

Yet God knows every dark thought and guilty memory; we can hide nothing from him. He regards all sinful thoughts and feelings with unutterable hatred; yet he knows them every one. But while hating our sin with unappeasable hatred, he loves us with unspeakable love. He looks at our thoughts and weighs them, because they are ours, and he would save us from the vain and sinful ones, and inspire and strengthen within us the wise and good ones. His love for us is as great as his knowledge of us, and leads him to interest himself in all that concerns us.

III. MOST ADMONITORY. 1. *No thoughts are unimportant.* Since the Lord takes knowledge of, and is so deeply interested in, all that arises in our mind, nothing there can be trivial. You think that your foolish or vain thoughts are of no importance; that they are not like words or actions which affect others; that thoughts influence no one so long as they remain unexpressed. But your thoughts give tone and colour to your mind and character. To a great extent they arise out of your character, and they react upon your character according to your treatment of them. If you foster the impure thought, it will make you more impure; if you entertain the trivial thought, it will increase your triviality. Your mind is God's temple. Should you not take heed how you treat it? 2. *All our thoughts should be such as he approves.* They should be: (1) True. He exhorts us to "buy the truth, and sell it not;" to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good." He is himself the "God of truth." Jesus Christ is "the Truth." We should cultivate the true in thought in every department of knowledge and of life. Endeavour to think only those thoughts which accord with the reality of things. Be true. (2) Pure. Shun with loathing the unchaste desire or impure feeling. You cannot prevent the low or foul suggestion; but you are free to welcome such suggestion, or to shrink from it with repugnance. Welcome it, and it will corrupt you. Resist it, and it cannot contaminate you. If you would be free from impure thoughts, you will gain your end most swiftly and surely by cultivating pure and beautiful ones. If your thoughts be true and pure, God will smile approval, etc. Be pure. (3) Earnest. Let not your true and holy thoughts be dreamy, visionary, impractical. We are in a world of toil and trial, sin and sorrow, sickness and death, a world that cries for help; and God demands earnest thought with a view to noble life and work.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Here is warning to the wicked.* God knows all your life and thought. You cannot hide anything from him (cf. Job xxxiv. 21, 22; Ps. cxxxix. 1—6; Heb. iv. 13). And he who knows us will also judge us. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." 2. *Here is encouragement to the good.* God knows your thoughts, devices, purposes, motives. He never misunderstands you. If, like Job, you are misjudged by man, you may say with him, "But he knoweth the way that I take." Therefore be encouraged.—W. J.

Vers. 14—20.—*A suffering people scorned by man and comforted by God.* "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, thy brethren," etc.

I. A SUFFERING PEOPLE SCORNED BY THEIR BRETHREN WHO THOUGHT THEMSELVES SECURE. (Ver. 15.) A considerable number of the fellow-countrymen of Ezekiel were, like him, suffering the privations and sorrows of exile; and the people that still remained in Jerusalem, instead of pitying the exiles, despised and insulted them. They spake of them: 1. *As rejected of God.* "Unto whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, Get you far from the Lord;" or, "Be ye far from Jehovah." These proud dwellers in Jerusalem thought that the presence of the Lord Jehovah was confined to the temple in that city, that the captives in Babylon were cut off from his presence, and rejected by him. They judged from outward appearances, and concluded that, because they were still in their own land and in the sacred city, while their brethren were in exile, they were the favoured people of God, and their brethren were cast off by him. And they came to this conclusion not sorrowfully because of the privations of their brethren, but with Pharisaic self-complacency and cruel disdain. 2. *As having no portion in the land of Israel.* The inhabitants of Jerusalem assumed that they who had gone into captivity had forfeited their estates, and that those estates should become the property of those who remained in the country. They said, "Unto us is this land given in possession." That which they unjustly denied to their exiled brethren they claimed for themselves. They arrogated to themselves an exclusive position as a people near unto the Lord, and exclusive possession of the land which he had given unto the whole of the Israelites. By their spirit and conduct these inhabitants of Jerusalem remind us of some in our own age who "profess and call themselves Christians," and who claim that only in their community can salvation be found, that only as administered amongst them are the sacraments valid, and that the Church of which they are members is the only true one. They could heartily join with the self-righteous people of Jerusalem in saying, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these." But not they who think themselves holiest and nearest to God, or who have the greatest reputation for religion amongst men, are most highly esteemed by him, but rather "the poor in spirit," the "lowly in heart." "The high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit." It was not the proud Pharisee, but the penitent publican, that "went down to his house justified: . . . for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

II. A SUFFERING PEOPLE VINDICATED AND COMFORTED BY THE LORD GOD. (Vers. 16—20.) The despised captives are vindicated and consoled by several gracious and encouraging assurances, which we will briefly notice. 1. *That they were the true people of God.* "Son of man, thy brethren, thy brethren, the men of thy kindred, and all the house of Israel wholly." The Prophet Jeremiah had already declared that the Israelites who were in exile were better in the sight of God than those who remained in Jerusalem (Jer. xxiv.). And now Ezekiel is told that his true brethren, brethren in spirit as well as according to the flesh, are to be found, not in Jerusalem, but among the exiles by the river Chebar. To them, as Hengstenberg points out, the future of the kingdom of God belonged, while "those who remained in Jerusalem, notwithstanding their high pretensions, were doomed to destruction." "All the house of Israel wholly," as contrasted with "the inhabitants of Jerusalem," is to be understood as a general statement, since there was in Jerusalem a godly remnant (ch. ix. 4—6), and amongst the exiles there were some who were not faithful to the Lord Jehovah (ch. xiv. 1—5). But, in the main, the true Israel was to be looked for, not in Jerusalem, but among the exiles in Babylon. How different in this respect was the Divine estimate from that of the Pharisaic dwellers in the sacred city! And may it not be in our day that to him who "seeth not as man seeth," not they who boast their privileges and piety, but the despised and lowly, are the genuine Israel of God? 2. *That they should find in the Lord God ample compensation for their lost privileges.* "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little Sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." It is more correct to translate, "I will be to them a Sanctuary for a little" time or season, referring to the comparatively short period of their captivity. Though they were far removed from their "holy and beautiful house," yet they should have communion with God; for he himself would be present with them, and the realization of his presence transforms any place into a hallowed temple. The people of Israel were too prone to regard the presence of God as confined to the temple at Jerusalem, or at most to the Holy Land. Under this impression, the Prophet "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." The Lord God, in assuring them that he would be to them as a sanctuary during their exile, corrects this error, and gives the germ of the precious truth that the devout and humble spirit may offer acceptable worship and hold blessed communion with him anywhere. And in this assurance we have an anticipation of the inspiring declaration of our Lord, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth," etc. (John iv. 23, 24). In the presence of God with them as a Sanctuary the exiles would find compensation for their enforced absence from their homes and from the temple and its ordinances. We have here a test of godly character. When the heart is truly and thoroughly right with God it finds compensation in him for every privation and loss. The assurance that we have him for our Portion will sustain and satisfy us in time of sorest need, and enable us to sing—

"Jesus, to whom I fly,
Doth all my wishes fill,
What though created streams are dry,
I have the Fountain still.

Stripped of mine earthly friends,
I find them all in One;
And peace and joy that never ends,
And heaven in Christ begun."
(C. Wesley.)

3. *That they should be restored to their country and privileges by the Lord God.* "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel." The inhabitants of Jerusalem said, "Unto us is this land given in possession;" but in answer thereto the Lord says to the exiles, "I will give you the land of Israel." And the promise was fulfilled when "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus King of Persia" to proclaim permission to them to return to their own land and to rebuild the temple of the Lord Jehovah—a permission of which more than forty thousand availed themselves. "It is well for us," says Matthew Henry, "that men's severe censures cannot cut us off from God's gracious promises. There are many that will be found to have a place in the holy land whom uncharitable men, by their monopolies of it to themselves, have secluded from it." 4. *That they should receive from the Lord the highest spiritual favours.* (Vers. 18—20.) Here is the assurance unto them of four spiritual blessings. (1) Unity of heart towards God. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you." Their heart had long been divided between the true God and idols, but it should be fixed upon him. By means of the discipline of the Captivity, their hearts were united to fear his Name. Such, in fact, has been the case; for since their return from Babylon they have not bowed down to idols. (2) Tenderness of heart towards God. "And I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh." By resisting his will and Word and by persisting in sin they had hardened their hearts; and he promised to give them a heart "soft and susceptible of the impressions of Divine grace. The promise is essentially Messianic, although a beginning of its fulfilment is already to be recognized in the period immediately after the return from the exile" (Hengstenberg). Resistance of Divine influence and rebellion against Divine commands still harden human hearts. "Take heed . . . lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." St. Paul speaks of some who have so hardened their heart as to be "past feeling" (Eph. iv. 18, 19). It is only God by his grace that can change the stone to flesh, and make the hard heart tender in penitence and piety. (3) Conformity of conduct to the will of God. This follows as a consequence of the change of heart. The renewed heart leads to a reformed life. Their reformation had two chief aspects—the renunciation of their sins, particularly the complete severance of themselves from idolatry (ver. 18), and their positive compliance with the holy will of God. This was the end aimed at in putting the new spirit within them: "That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances." The piety of the heart must and will be seen in the practice of the life. If the fountain be purified, the stream will be pure. (4) Confirmation in the most exalted and blessed relationship. "And they shall be my people, and I will be their God." This follows in natural order what has gone before. By the renewal of their hearts he restores them to himself as his chosen people; and by the obedience of their lives to him they testify that he is their God. This relationship is the richest of all blessings; it comprises all needful good, and crowns every other blessing. If "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall want nothing." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the Strength of my heart, and my Portion for ever."—W. J.

Ver. 16.—*God the Sanctuary of his people.* "Yet will I be to them as a little Sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Instead of "as a little Sanctuary," it is better to translate, "a Sanctuary for a little." The assurance given in the text seems strange at first. The Lord Jehovah will be a Sanctuary to his people. He is the grand Object of worship: how, then, can he be the place of worship? The exiles in Babylon were far removed from all the joyous privileges of public worship; from their temple, with all its precious and sacred associations, they had been ruthlessly sundered. They had long forsaken God and at length they became a prey to their enemies. And in this idolatrous country, while the inhabitants of Jerusalem were dividing them, and boasting their own security, Jehovah promises the captives that he himself will be to them a Sanctuary, and in himself he would compensate them for the loss of their religious privileges. All those blessings which they had been accustomed to associate with the sanctuary he would bestow upon them.

I. THE SANCTUARY WAS A PLACE OF REFUGE AND SAFETY. Through centuries men had been accustomed to take refuge in sanctuaries from the enemies or persecutors by whom they were pursued, and there every life was held to be inviolably secure. The most implacable foe was compelled to recognize the security afforded by the holy place (cf. 1 Kings i. 50—53). So Jehovah promises to Israel to be to them a sacred and inviolate asylum from all dangers in the land of their captivity (cf. Isa. viii. 14; xxxii. 2; Ps. ix. 9; xlvi. 1, 7, 11). The Lord was a Sanctuary for his scattered people—a Sanctuary from the storm of persecution, from the oppressions of their conquerors, and from the rage of their enemies. He still sustains this relation to his people. He is still "a Refuge for us." How blessed that in a life so stormy as man's often is, God is a Sanctuary unto him! Let us hide ourselves in him.

II. THE SANCTUARY WAS A PLACE OF COMMUNION WITH GOD. There God manifested himself to his people, and made communications of his will to them (cf. Exod. xxv. 22; Numb. vii. 89). So that the promise to be a Sanctuary unto his people was a promise of communion with himself; that, though they were driven from the temple of their fatherland, yet in their exile God would still commune with them. This assurance involves more than we sometimes recognize. If we commune with God we must *receive his thoughts.* "How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" etc. Communion with God involves the *realization of his gracious presence.* In fellowship there is always friendliness. "Henceforth I call you not servants," etc. (John xv. 15). How inspiring and blessed it is to feel the friendly presence of God with us! We may always have this sanctuary of communion with the Highest. In all the rush and roar and turmoil of a busy and troubled life we may realize the safety and comfort of the sanctuary of the Divine presence. We may have a Gerizim or a Zion which none can behold but God and the angels. We may have a holy of holies in our poor hearts, which we may carry with us into the Babylon of the world's business and strife.

III. Let us take hold of the principle involved in the text, which we take to be THAT THE LOSS OF EVEN THE MOST PRECIOUS POSSESSIONS IS MADE UP TO US BY GOD OUT OF THE FULNESS WHICH DWELLETH IN HIM, IF HE IS OUR PORTION. The promise of the text involved as much to the exiles in Babylon. If the Lord is our Portion, he will afford us blessed compensations for any privations we may be called to sustain. Let us take illustrations of this. There are times when some of the people of God are subjected to *loss of property;* their natural comforts are much diminished; many of the enjoyments of life, which they had regarded as essential to their happiness and almost to their life, are taken away; and they have painful misgivings as to how they shall bear these privations in the future. We dread to meet the shock of reduced position and straitened circumstances. But when the shock comes, we find full compensation in God. His grace sustains us. His peace grows within us. His comforts delight our soul. He is "the Strength of our heart, and our Portion for ever." We are enabled to say, with St. Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," etc. (Phil. iv. 11—13). The Divine compensations are also given in *painful bereavements.* In your home there was a beautiful and beloved child; you held that child as a most precious gift of God; your very worship of God became more impassioned and devout as you thought of that living and dear revelation of his goodness to you. Your child was to you "a little sanctuary;" through his beloved life you drew nearer to God. Yet God took your child away from you; and oh, the anguish of your desolate heart! Perhaps you were in danger of thinking more of the child than of God, of loving the gift more than the Giver, of prizing the sanctuary more than the God of the sanctuary. And so God took away the child whom you almost idolized. At first you were sorely afflicted, but God said, "I will be to thee a Sanctuary," and gradually the troubled heart became still, and was calmed and comforted. And now by his own love God makes up to you for your great loss. And in coming years, when you imagine you will lack the tender filial ministries you had anticipated from your child, he will more than supply the deficiencies by the arrangements of his own infinite tenderness and care. God also compensates his people for the loss of *religious privileges.* In his providence he sometimes removes us by sickness from the services of the sanctuary, and we have a season of weary waiting for his restoring hand. We anticipate with sadness the Lord's day, when his people will be worshipping in the courts of his house, and we suffering through the lonely hours at home. But the day arrives, and with it a joyous disappointment. God himself becomes to us a Sanctuary. He compensates us for the loss of psalmody by inspiring diviner music in our heart, for the loss of "common worship" by giving us deeper spiritual communion with himself and with all holy souls, and for the loss of sacred ministrations by the immediate and blessed ministry of his Holy Spirit to our spirit. And so the day we dreaded was rich in present blessing, and bright with gleams of the glory that awaits us in the future. Or in his providence God removes us to a district where we are separated from the influence of a generous and godly friend, or from the ministry of a valued teacher or pastor. Our regret is very keen, our misgivings as to our future progress are serious, and perhaps our dissatisfaction with providential arrangements is in danger of becoming great. But in this also the Lord becomes to us a Sanctuary. To our increased need he gives more of his infinite fulness. And we find that by blessing us with another teacher or pastor, or by means of the devout and earnest study of his holy Word, or by the ministry of good literature, or by the immediate action of his Holy Spirit upon our spirit, he compensates us for all our losses. Herein is one of the great blessednesses of the portion of the godly. As our need grows, God reveals unto us his own infinite sufficiency more and more fully, and out of that sufficiency he giveth more grace. The more loud and fierce the storm, the more closely does he enfold us in his inviolate protection. The more numerous and urgent our requirements, the more abundant and prompt are his supplies. Make him your Portion, and infinite resources are yours (cf. Ps. lxxxiv. 11; Lam. iii. 24; Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8).—W. J.

Ver. 19.—*A united heart the gift of God.* "I will give them one heart." The exiles in Babylon, to whom the text was addressed, had long wandered from God into idolatry. Their heart had not been fixed or united. The promise was fulfilled in their case in this sense—that since their return from captivity they have never lapsed into idolatry.

I. THIS PROMISE IS APPLICABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Oneness of interest and heart in the welfare of a Church on the part of its members is essential to its prosperity. 1. *Oneness of heart in brotherly unity is necessary.* "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" etc. (Ps. cxxxiii.). To secure this we must exercise mutual forbearance and charity, and cultivate an affectionate regard for each other. 2. *Oneness of desire for the prosperity of the work of God is necessary.* There is reason to fear that this desire is not very deep on the part of some Church-members, who very often grumble at what others are doing, and do nothing themselves. If we have this desire, we shall take it to God in *prayer.* We shall "keep not silence, and give him no rest," etc. (Isa. lxii. 6, 7). If we have this desire, it will lead us to *personal efforts* to attain its fulfilment. To retain this unity of desire we must be prepared to waive personal opinions as to minor methods, keeping the eye steadily fixed upon the grand objects which we are aiming at. Mutual concessions are necessary to abiding unity. In seeking unity in the Church let us trust the promise of the text, and use appropriate means to secure it.

II. THE TEXT IS APPLICABLE TO DIFFERENT CLASSES OF PERSONAL CHARACTER. Examples of hearts divided and purposes unsettled are to be found in every province of life—in business, in mental culture, in religion. Yet everywhere the thing is evil. Division is weakness. "The rolling stone gathers no moss." "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." One-heartedness is essential to progress in anything. The men who have attained marked success in any pursuit have followed it steadily and persistently. Concentration is power. "Unity is strength" everywhere and in everything. Let us specify certain characters to whom the text is applicable. 1. *To the insincere.* There are persons who are not true, whose thoughts and words do not agree, whose appearance and reality are not harmonious. Our text is a promise for them if they will receive it. The man of renewed heart is honest, true. The mere form of godliness, or profession of discipleship to Christ, will avail us nothing. Unless we have the life and power of Christ, the name of Christian will be worse than worthless to us. The genuine Christian is sincere and upright. 2. *To those who are endeavouring to "serve God and mammon."* It is impossible to be at once devoted to worldly ends and to God. A worldly spirit is incompatible with real religion. The spirit of the world is opposed to the spirit of Christ. One or other must be supreme in us. We cannot yield ourselves to the pursuit of the pleasures, honours, or riches of this world, and to the service of the Lord Jesus at the same time. It is impossible to combine the two things. God promises to give us one heart—a heart undivided and thoroughly fixed upon himself. Are we willing to receive the blessing, and to receive it now? 3. *To those who "halt between two opinions."* Many are wavering and undecided as to personal religion. They have not resolved to try to combine the service of "God and mammon;" but they have not elected whom they will serve. They have often been religiously impressed, but never decided. They have often felt the supreme importance of religion, but have not yielded to its claims. They are wavering and undecided. They feel without wisely acting. They have religious emotion, but not religious resolution. They procrastinate the great choice till "a more convenient season." They will not take the decisive step. They are not one-hearted. Now, they may obtain a united heart from God. The hesitation which is so injurious and perilous to them would be banished if they would accept God's promise in the text, and decide by his help to serve him. He would "give them one heart," and sufficient strength to perform their resolution. And then they could sing, with David, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." Thus the text promises to us unity and thoroughness of heart. Our own weakness we know; and how prone to unsteadiness, change, and division our hearts are. But "God is greater than our heart," and he proffers to us the unity and stability which we need. In the strength of his promise let us pray, "Unite my heart to fear thy Name," and let us consecrate ourselves unreservedly unto him.—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XII.

Ver. 1.—The word of the Lord, etc. This formula, so familiar in Isaiah and Jeremiah, appears for the first time in Ezekiel, but occurs repeatedly afterwards, especially in this chapter (vers. 8, 17, 21, 26, and again ch. xiii. 1; xiv. 2, *et al.*). The teaching by "the visions of God" ceases, and that of direct message or symbolic acts is resumed. In each case the point aimed at was the same. The people who heard the one or saw the other were to be taught how utterly groundless was the hope that Jerusalem could hold out against its enemies. The interval between the two was probably a short one, and the new teaching, we may conjecture, had its starting-point in the prophecies of a speedy deliverance which were current both at Jerusalem and among the exiles at Babylon.

Ver. 2.—Which have eyes to see, etc. We note the words in their relation both to like utterances in the past (Isa. vi. 9; xlii. 20), and by Ezekiel's contemporary (Jer. v. 21), and in the future by our Lord (Matt. xiii. 13), by St. John (John xii. 40), and lastly by St. Paul (Acts xxviii. 27). The thought and phrase were naturally as ever-recurring as the fact.

Vers. 3—7.—Prepare thee stuff for removing, etc.; better, ***equipment for a journey***, with the implied thought that it is the journey of one going into exile. "Bag and baggage," all the household goods which an exile could take with him (Exod. xii. 11, 34 may supply an illustration), were to be brought out in broad daylight and piled up opposite his door. Then in the twilight (Revised Version, *in the dark*, and so in vers. 7, 12) he was to go forth, not by the door of his house, but by breaking through the wall (with such walls as those of ch. xiii. 11 the process would not be difficult), as a man might do who was escaping secretly from a city through the gates of which he dared not pass (ver. 5), and was to start with his travelling chattels upon his shoulder. Lastly (ver. 6), as the strangest feature of all, he was to go forth with his face covered, as one who wished to avoid recognition, as one also who could not see one step of the way before him. This, it is intimated, would startle even the most careless, and in this way he would become, as he had been before in like symbolic acts (ch. iv., v.), as Isaiah (xx. 2) and Jeremiah (xxvii. 2) had been before him, a sign unto the house of Israel.

Vers. 8, 9.—The commands were obeyed, and the prophet waited for the next inspiration, the next word of the Lord. It would seem as if he had himself done what he was told to do without knowing what it meant. It was not till night had passed to morning that he was able to answer the question which the exiles asked him, **What doest thou?** At last the answer came.

Vers. 10, 11.—**This burden concerneth the prince in Jerusalem**; literally, *the prince is this burden in Jerusalem.* The word "burden," in the sense of "prophecy," so common in Isaiah and Jeremiah and other prophets, as Hosea (viii. 10) and Nahum (i. 1), is used by Ezekiel here only. Possibly he on the whole avoided it, as having fallen into discredit through its constant use by the false prophets (Jer. xxiii. 33—38), and preferred the formula of "the word of Jehovah." As interpreted by Jer. xxxix. 4 and 2 Kings xxv. 4, the "prince" is Zedekiah. Possibly Ezekiel avoided the title "king," as seeing in him one who was a ruler *de facto,* but not a king *de jure.* The facts related in Jer. xxxix. 4 exactly correspond with the symbolic act. Zedekiah and his men of war escape from the city by night, "by the way of the king's garden, by the gate between the two walls," probably enough with faces covered, as David's was in his flight (2 Sam. xv. 30), to avoid detection, or as a sign of mourning, and through some freshly made exit from the palace. The further significance of the covered face is found in the fact that Zedekiah was blinded at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar's orders, and from that time could not see the ground on which he trod. Those who see in every Old Testament prediction nothing but a prophecy *ex eventu* infer from this that this section of Ezekiel was written after the destruction of Jerusalem. I do not take that view, and place it in close connection with the preceding chapters. We note in ver. 11 the peculiar phrase, "I am *your* sign." Ezekiel, in what he does in the presence of the exiles, is figuring that which, before long, will come to pass in Jerusalem. They were to go forth into captivity as he had gone. **For they shall remove,** the Revised Version gives, *they shall go into exile.*

Ver. 12.—**For that he see not,** read, with the Revised Version, *because he shall not see.*

Ver. 13.—**My net also will I spread,** etc. Compare the same image in Lam. i. 13. The prediction of ver. 12 is reiterated with emphasis. Zedekiah shall be in Babylon, yet shall not see. Josephus ('Ant.,' x. vii. 2; viii. 2) relates that Ezekiel sent this prophecy to Jerusalem, and that Zedekiah, finding an apparent discrepancy in the words that he should not see Babylon, and those of Jeremiah (xxxii. 4; xxxiv. 3), hardened himself in his unbelief. There is no reason, however, for supposing that Josephus had access to any other records than the books of the two prophets, and his narrative looks rather like an imagined history of what might have been.

Vers. 14, 15.—**And I will scatter.** The capture of the king would naturally be followed by the dispersion of his adherents, some of whom would fall by the sword, while a few (Hebrew, *men of number,* i.e. easily counted) would escape to some neighbouring country, where they might hope to find a refuge. There they would have to tell their tale of shame, and to let the heathen know that Jehovah was thus punishing their abominations (comp. ch. xiv. 22, 23). The prophecy ends with the familiar formula, **They shall know that I am the Lord.**

Ver. 17.—The opening words, **The word of the Lord came to me,** imply an interval of passivity and silence. One conscious burst of inspiration came to an end, and was followed, after a time, by another.

Ver. 18.—**Eat thy bread with quaking,** etc. No special stress is to be laid on the fact that only bread and water are named. The prophet is not dwelling now on the scarcity of food in the besieged city, as he had done in ch. iv. 9—17, but on the fear and terror which should haunt the lives of the besieged. Here again we can scarcely doubt that, as in ver. 11, Ezekiel was a sign to those among whom he lived. Outwardly and visibly he was seen after his strange flitting, cowering in a corner, as one hunted down and dreading pursuit, with every look and gesture of extremest terror. This was to be the portion of those who escaped and whose life was "given them for a prey." The strange act was to be explained to "the people of the land," *i.e.* the exiles among whom Ezekiel lived. The short prediction ends with the usual formula. There is another interval, and then another inspiration.

Ver. 22.—**What is that proverb,** etc.? The words indicate how the previous messages had been received. Like the men of Jerusalem, the exiles could not believe that the judgment was so near. They said, in words that had become proverbial: (1) **The days are prolonged.** "Month after month passes" (it is obvious that they had so passed since Ezekiel began his work), "and yet the end comes not." Such throughout the world's history has been the cry of those of little, or of no, faith (Amos vi. 3; Isa. v. 19; Jer. xvii. 15; Matt. xxiv. 48; 2 Pet. iii. 4). (2) **Every vision faileth.** "The prophet is a dreamer of dreams. We have heard of many such visions, yet still all things continue as they were."

Ver. 23.—The prophet meets the current proverb with a counter-proverb of his own: "The days are not far off, but have come near." Compare the language of the Baptist (Matt. iii. 2), of our Lord (Matt. iv. 17), of St. Paul (Rom. xiii. 11). For the true prophet there is always a near fulfilment, though there may be also an ultimate and more complete reality of which that is the pledge and earnest. The "vision" shall not fail; every *word* (so in the Hebrew) shall become a reality.

Ver. 24.—Flattering divination. The word is the same as the "smooth things" of Isa. xxx. 10, the "flattering lips" of Ps. xii. 2, 3. LXX., *μαντευόμενος τὰ πρὸς χάριν*; Vulgate, *ambigua*. The "divinations" (the Hebrew word is found only here and in ch. xiii. 7, though cognate words are found elsewhere) are so described, not without a touch of scorn in the use of a word which is not applied to the utterance of the true prophets, because they promised a speedy deliverance, even within "two full years" (Jer. xxviii. 3).

Ver. 25.—The thought of ver. 23 is reiterated with emphasis. The rebellious house, whether at Tel-Abib or in Jerusalem (probably the word is used with special reference to the former), should see the word of Jehovah fulfilled in their own days. One notes how the prophet dwells on the word prolonged, as though that had specially stirred his indignation. So again—

Vers. 26, 27.—The words imply another interval of silence, meditation, and then a fresh utterance to the same effect as before. In this case (ver. 27) we trace a slight modification in the language of the gainsayers. They recognize Ezekiel both as a seer and a prophet. They do not say that his vision "faileth." They content themselves with throwing the fulfilment into the distant future. Their thought is that of the proverb which has been ascribed to more than one king or statesman, *Après moi le déluge.* To these his answer is nearly in the same terms as before. Still harping on the offensive word, he tells them that nothing that he has spoken shall be "prolonged." The destruction of the temple and the holy city, the departure of the Divine Presence from the sanctuary, these were already within measurable distance

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Blind eyes and deaf ears.* I. ALL MEN HAVE ORGANS FOR PERCEIVING SPIRITUAL TRUTH. These blind Jews have eyes and the deaf have ears. Neither class is deformed or mutilated in respect of their organs of sense. Here is the paradox, the surprising situation. It is men with eyes and ears who are blind and deaf. It is no wonder that the lower animals should live without man's religion in a life of brutish appetite. But it is surprising that beings endowed with higher faculties should degrade themselves to such a life. That this is the case with the most hardened and ignorant may be proved by the experience of life. 1. The most brutalized sinner was once a child. Then he had the child's wondering, open-eyed vision of truth. 2. The most degraded have been restored. Then the faculty of spiritual perception has been reawakened. This proves that it was only dormant, not absent. 3. Even in a condition of indifference a degraded, deadened soul may be aroused. The bow drawn at a venture may send an arrow into a joint of the armour of worldly thought and find the natural sensitiveness beneath.

II. SOME MEN HAVE LOST THE POWER OF PERCEIVING SPIRITUAL TRUTH. Their eyes are blind and their ears deaf. This does not mean merely that they have not the gifts Joel referred to (Joel ii. 28). It means that they do not perceive the truth which is declared to them by the messengers of God. 1. The words spoken are not heeded. They are mere sound. Immediately they are spoken in the ear a rush of unsympathetic thoughts sweeps them away. It is like sowing by the wayside. The seed is trampled underfoot. 2. If the words are attended to, the personal significance of them is not grasped. They are mere ideas unrealized. They are not felt to have any relation to life. Thus a biblical scholar may be blind to the truth of God.

III. THIS STATE OF SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS AND DEAFNESS IS CAUSED BY SIN. The people are "a rebellious house," and therefore they cannot perceive the Divine message. We have come upon one of the worst consequences of sin. It deadens the soul against its own guilt and against the messages from God to the sinner. This is very different from intellectual dulness. The will of God is so revealed that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein." Indeed, mere intellectual acumen does very little in helping us to perceive spiritual and moral truth. God has hidden from the "wise and prudent" what he has revealed to "babes and sucklings." The preaching of the cross of Christ is foolishness to many of the world's wise men (1 Cor. i. 18, 19), because they have not spiritual sympathy with it (1 Cor. ii. 14). Note the blinding and deafening which are sometimes ascribed to God (*e.g.* Isa. vi. 9, 10)—because it is the abuse of God's action that leads to such a condition, and because it is a condition of Divine judgment—are here brought back to man's guilt.

IV. GOD DOES NOT NEGLECT THE BLIND AND DEAF. Their state is one of guilt—for they brought it on themselves—and also one of danger. But they are not left alone in it. Ezekiel is to proceed to more simple and striking action, in order to extort attention from the indifferent. We must shake the sleeper when his house is on fire. We want more rousing preaching. God has pity on the blind and deaf, and it is according to his mercy that every effort should be made to reach them. Christ gives new sight and hearing (Luke iv. 18).

Ver. 11.—*Teaching by example.* The Jews had neglected the words of Ezekiel; the prophet is now to attempt to rouse them by a fresh method, by an illustrative action. They would not attend when he told them that the trouble was coming; he is now to perform before their eyes an action illustrative of that trouble. The inhabitants of Jerusalem refused to admit that they will be sent into captivity, and it would seem that their friends in captivity were in sympathy with them in this respect, and could communicate with them. So Ezekiel packs up his goods and removes his house, as a sign of the approaching removal of the Jews into captivity. This is the most effective method of teaching.

I. WHY TEACHING BY EXAMPLE IS EFFECTIVE. 1. *It is lucid.* Deeds are more visible than words. Men of various languages can understand the same facts. The bold outlines of an event are more readily grasped than the floating sounds of speech. 2. *It is impressive.* We are struck by what we see with our own eyes far more than by what is reported to us by others. The greatest deeds recorded in history do not produce so much impression on us as the much smaller things with which we have had personal contact; but those historic deeds are far more interesting than abstract philosophical principles. 3. *It is suggestive.* Deeds are more eloquent than words. They are many-sided, and every facet is capable of reflecting some truth. Thus the same illustration may convey various aspects of truth to different persons. 4. *It is enduring.* The memory of events remains when that of words has faded. Nothing dies so rapidly as the influence of an orator. Facts live for ever, while words of preaching vanish almost as soon as they are spoken.

II. WHAT TEACHING BY EXAMPLE IS MOST EFFECTIVE. 1. *That which is human.* We may take illustrations from nature, and read "sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything;" but human life is more full of instruction—more lucid, impressive, suggestive, and enduring in its lessons. Hence the inestimable value of honest biography. 2. *That which is personal to the teacher.* It is good to be able to point to great examples in history. But when the preacher himself does some striking deed, his influence is far greater. Ezekiel was himself to remove in illustration of the Captivity. We can teach best by our lives. 3. *That which involves self-sacrifice.* Ezekiel's action was one of trouble and vexation. If our message costs us little, it may be lightly esteemed. Nothing is so impressive as the evidence of pain and cost in the effort to enlighten others. Self-denial is the most eloquent of persuasive influences. He who thus puts himself to trouble proves his sincerity, and impresses his neighbours with his own earnestness, and with the corresponding weightiness of his message.

Note: All this may be most perfectly illustrated from the gospel of Christ. Here we are taught by the *facts* of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Those facts are seen in the *personal history* of our great Teacher, and pre-eminently in his *sacrifice* of himself to the truth and for the benefit of the world.

Ver. 13.—*God's net.* I. GOD SPREADS A NET. 1. *God will not leave guilty men free.* They have a time of liberty, but there will be a limit to this. Though they have a long tether, some day its end will be reached. Freedom is given to allow scope for choice. If the power of choice is abused, the freedom will be withdrawn. 2. *God employs means for restraining the liberty of bad men.* He does not lay hold of them with his hand; he uses a net. In the present instance the net was Nebuchadnezzar. That heathen monarch did not know that he was a mere instrument in the hand of God; yet did God so completely hold him in this respect that he called the man "my servant Nebuchadnezzar" (Jer. xxv. 9). Thus God overrules the movements of kings. 3. *These means may not be perceived by the unhappy victims.* The net is a snare, and "in vain is a snare spread in the sight of any bird." We must not suppose that God really deceives his children. The Jews had been warned. But their eyes were blind and their ears deaf (ver. 2). The danger is not the less because men do not perceive it. Just when a man boasts of his greatest triumph the meshes of a Divine judgment may be drawing together about his doomed life.

II. GOD ENSNARES IN HIS NET WHOMSOEVER HE WILL. 1. *He designs the net for particular persons.* In the verse before us it is spread for one man. There is no element of chance in the judgments of Heaven. God considers the case of each soul, and acts *accordingly.* 2. *All the men caught in God's net are sinners.* He has no terrors for the good. He is not like the tempter, who ensnares men into evil. Every man who is caught in God's net of judgment has been first ensnared in the devil's net of sin. 3. *The greatest are not beyond the reach of this net.* In the present instance the net is spread expressly to catch no less a person than Zedekiah, the King of Jerusalem. Massive battlements and the serried ranks of a mighty army cannot keep off the invisible entanglement of the net of judgment.

III. THERE IS NO EARTHLY MEANS OF ESCAPING FROM GOD'S NET. Its threads may be fine as gossamer, but they are strong as steel. Zedekiah was to be taken in the snare, and brought to Babylon in so helpless a state that he would not even see the place, for, as the event proved, his eyes were to be put out. The king fled by night from Jerusalem, but was caught by the Chaldeans near Jericho. As "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera," the course of armies and nations turned against the guilty Jews and their wicked king. There is no hope for the impenitent.

IV. CHRIST HAS SPREAD A NEW NET OF SALVATION. He told his apostles that they should be fishers of men (Matt. iv. 19), and he compared the kingdom of heaven to a drag-net (Matt. xiii. 47). The only way of escaping from the awful net of judgment is to permit one's self to be taken in the saving net of the gospel.

Ver. 18.—*Fear.* Ezekiel, in conformity with his new, desperate method of rousing the heedless Jews, is now to dramatize Fear in his own person and action, as a sign of the terror that will seize upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the days of its overthrow.

I. FEAR ARISES FROM EVIL CAUSES. The sound and innocent soul in healthy circumstances should not know fear. Observe some of the causes of fear. 1. *Ignorance.* "Fear always springs from ignorance," says Emerson. There is a sense of the mysterious and uncertain about it. When we perceive an approaching calamity, we may shrink from it and feel the keenest distress; but the peculiar agony of fear lies in the darkness of futurity. This, of course, implies nothing morally defective, for we are necessarily limited. Childish fears naturally haunt childish ignorance. But though not morally wrong, except in the careless and wilful, ignorance is an evil circumstance to be conquered. 2. *Weakness.* There is a weakness of nerve which belongs to one's bodily condition, and so some are constitutionally timorous. But the worst fear springs from cowardice, *i.e.* from a culpable laxity of moral fibre. 3. *Guilt.* Fear followed the Fall. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." We know that we deserve ill; therefore we cannot be surprised if we are to receive it. This is an intellectual conception; but the moral effect of sin is stronger. The man who is conscious of his sin feels ashamed, smitten with helplessness; and the heavens gather up black thunder-clouds over his head.

II. FEAR IS HURTFUL. 1. It is one of the most *painful* elements of punishment. The murderer suffers infinitely more agony in the condemned cell than he can ever feel on the gallows. "There is but one thing of which I am afraid," says Montaigne, "and that is fear." 2. Fear is a *cause of disaster.* "The direst foe of courage," says George Macdonald, "is the fear itself, not the object of it; and the man who can overcome his own terror is a hero and more." We are paralyzed by fear. As in dreams the limbs are heavy, like lead, when a terror is approaching, so in waking life we find that the terror which threatens fascinates us into helplessness. 3. Worse than all this, fear is *morally degrading.* "Fear is cruel and mean," says Emerson. It is a selfish passion, and it lowers our whole tone and character.

III. FEAR MAY BE CONQUERED BY FAITH. Constitutional bravery will exclude the possibility of fear. "Fear!" exclaimed the hero Nelson, when only a boy, to his grandmother, who had asked if he had not met fear when he had lost his way, "what is it like? I have never seen it." Such incapacity for fear is a splendid natural endowment, but it has not the moral character of victory over fear in those who are capable of its pangs. The true antidote to fear is faith. We cannot know everything, and so dispel the ignorance out of which fear springs; nor can we create in ourselves the strength of a hero by a sheer act of will; nor can we deny or repudiate our guilt. But we may trust God's protection in the darkness, lean upon his strength in the hour of need, and rely upon his pardon when we repent of sin and turn to the grace of Christ. So the feeblest can say, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" "I will go in the strength of the Lord God." Moreover, the work of faith will be completed by love, for "perfect love casteth out fear."

Vers. 22, 23.—*A worthless proverb.* Ezekiel quotes a proverb with which the Jews are comforting themselves, and tells them that it cannot be relied on.

I. A PROVERB IS READILY ACCEPTED. 1. *Its aptness of expression attracts us.* We are taken by neatness of phrase. A lie may be ably expressed, and a great fallacy may strike us as particularly well put. Thus the form disguises the substance. 2. *Its wide use throws us off our guard.* We regard it as an embodiment of "the wisdom of the many." What "everybody" says is taken for granted as true. Passing freely in conversational commerce, the question of a familiar proverb's soundness is scarcely raised. 3. *Its antiquity makes it venerable.* Proverbs are supposed to contain "the wisdom of the ancients."

II. A PROVERB MAY BE FALSE. 1. *Aptness of expression is no guarantee of truth.* This is only a matter of form. Surely Descartes made a mistake in asserting that seeing a thought clearly was equivalent to an assurance of the truth of it. Lucidity of expression may cover falsity of idea. 2. *The mass of men may be in error.* The voice of the people is by no means always the voice of God. When one common prejudice seizes many minds, they are all likely to be deluded into a common error. 3. *The venerableness of a proverb does not guarantee its truth.* It is forgotten that, as Bacon tells us, *we* are the ancients, and those who lived in the early days belong to the childhood of the race. Other things being equal, the latest saying *should* be the truest. Certainly no premium is to be set on the knowledge of antiquity.

III. A PROVERB MAY BE MISAPPLIED. This was the case with the Jews to whom Ezekiel referred. They quoted a proverb revealing a startling insight into one remarkable feature of Hebrew prophecy which until lately had been almost lost sight of. The prophet sees the future as though it were present, and he describes it in such a way as to suggest to many that it is nearer than it proves to be. There is little perspective in prophecy. Its horizon often appears to move before us as its predictions are translated into facts of history. But this is not always the case, nor does the postponement of fulfilment mean its never coming. In the present case the proverb of postponement was misapplied, for fulfilment was close at hand. Here is the danger of general phrases. True in one set of circumstances, they may be utterly false in another application.

IV. A PROVERB SHOULD BE TESTED. We should treat our proverbs as uncertain coins, and ring them before using them. Then we shall find that not a few are of as base metal as Hanoverian sovereigns. There is a sort of proverbial orthodoxy constructed out of set theological phrases which has no other stamp upon it than that of preachers' usage. Loyalty to truth compels us to submit this religious coinage to the test of Scripture, conscience, and experience. The most dangerous proverbial expressions are those that flatter ourselves. With the Jews the favourite proverb was one that postponed the prospect of the evil day and threw doubt on the Divine message. Cynical unbelief is full of self-assurance. But it is not safe to trust to it simply because it may be clever or prevalent. Every idea that denies the Divine word is sure to prove delusive.

Ver. 24.—*The end of delusions.* The Jews had been deluding themselves with a false proverb—or at all events, with a proverb falsely applied (see ver. 22). Ezekiel tells them that such errors and those of flattering divination will both cease. There is to be an end to error.

I. Delusions win a temporary triumph. The false prophet has his day of success. Flattering errors easily win their way into popularity. The history of thought is largely made up of the story of errors—their genesis, growth, prevalence, triumph, and decay. This fact should guard us against accepting any motive just because it happens to be triumphant. There are fashions in philosophy and theology. But truth is eternal and abiding, and it is therefore simply foolish to accept the ideas which chance to be in vogue at our own time without further inquiry.

II. The triumph of delusions is fruitless. Error is always barren of any solid results. It is darkness, death, negation. Even when at the acme of prosperity it is but as a bubble; it has no substance in it. There came a time when the vain vision and the flattering divination of the Jews were to be put to the test in the siege of Jerusalem. At this moment of trial they were found to be utterly useless. This is the fatal defect of a false idea. We may cherish it for long until we need to use it. But directly we put it into practice it crumbles away.

III. Trouble exposes delusions. So long as Jerusalem prospered the vain visions continued, and the flattering divination was practised without intermission. It was the touch of real trouble that broke the bubble. Many a comfortable soul is living in a fool's paradise of direful error without fear or pain until some real adversity comes. Then the utter delusiveness of the admired notions is suddenly revealed with appalling amazement. If we are able to hold to fatal notions till the end of life, we shall find at last that they are but rotten planks, which will break up when we try to float on them over the chill waters of death.

IV. The exposure of delusions is a blessing. Naturally enough, it first strikes the helpless dupes with dismay as a pure calamity. Why should they not be permitted to dream their lives away on a bed of roses although the volcano should be slumbering beneath? Because even apart from consequences truth is supremely desirable, and error is an evil thing. We ought to be thankful for a painful process which leads us out of darkness into light. But it is not necessary for us to wait for the alarming awakening. The revelation of God in Christ and the truths of inspiration are with us to spare us the terrible method of deliverance from error, and to lead us out of darkness into the light of Christ.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 3.—*Hope mingled with fear.* If we bear in mind that this language was employed by the Lord in directing Ezekiel how to deal with the house of Israel, we shall see what light it casts upon human liberty and responsibility. The prophet was to make use of certain symbolical means with the view of wakening his countrymen to a sense of their danger, and of inducing them to repent and to turn unto the Lord. Now, believing in the Divine omniscience and foreknowledge, we cannot but be assured that the Eternal foresaw what would be the result of the appeal which was to be made. Yet he spoke to the prophet as if that result was uncertain. "It may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house." Ezekiel did not and could not know what would be the issue of this ministry with which he was entrusted; and he was to do his work in a perfectly natural and human way, to act as believing in the liberty of those to whom he was sent, and as leaving the responsibility entirely with them. He experienced in his mind a conflict of emotions; hope was mingled with fear.

I. A natural expectation founded upon experience. Ezekiel knew that he was sent to "a rebellious house," to "a stiff-necked people;" he could not possibly be blind to the character and disposition of those whom he knew so well. Every herald and messenger of God is sometimes sent to the unbelieving, the hard-hearted, the apparently unimpressible. Such characters have often been brought into contact with the Divine Word, and have as often spurned it. Judging by experience only, how can any servant of God go to such, taking with him a new message, or the old message with new arguments and persuasions to enforce it, without something of discouragement, something of foreboding? It is not possible. Habits are confirmed as days and years pass on; the hard heart is likely to grow harder instead of softer. Only the hammer can break, only the fire can melt it.

II. A CONTRARY HOPE SPRINGING FROM BENEVOLENCE. Divine kindness addresses the rebellious and impenitent yet once again. "It may be they will consider." If this view is possible to God, surely it is possible to God's human messenger. He knows, perhaps, that his own ignorance has been instructed, his own obduracy has been melted; and he hopes that in this the experience of others may resemble his own. If men will but consider, consideration may lead to repentance. And why should they not consider? Is not the message from God a message that deserves serious and patient attention? The good will which the Lord's servant has towards his fellow-men forbids him to despair of their salvation, to abandon labour on their behalf.

III. THE APPOINTED MEANS HAVING BEEN USED BY GOD'S MESSENGER, THE RESPONSIBILITY MUST BE LEFT WITH THOSE ADDRESSED IN GOD'S NAME. The herald of God delivers his message, presents the offers and the requirements of Divine authority; he does this with mingled fear and hope; and he can do no more. The record has always been a record resembling that of Paul's ministry at Rome: "Some believed, and some believed not." The minister of Christ preaches the gospel, whether men will hear or forbear. He delivers his soul. He cannot command results. He can simply repeat the admonition of his Master, "Take heed how ye hear!" And it is well that he should not discharge his ministry in a spirit of dejection and despondency. He must indeed face the possibility that those whose welfare he seeks may refuse to consider; they are free agents, and the competing voices of the world are powerful, attractive. Yet he should not forget that they may consider; and if they will only yield so far, he may reasonably hope that consideration may lead to repentance and to life eternal.—T.

Ver. 18.—*Trembling anticipations.* Frequently was the ministry of Ezekiel a ministry of symbolism as well as of language. Very pictorial and effective must some of the prescribed actions of the prophet have appeared to those who witnessed them. On the occasion referred to in this passage he ate his bread and drank his water with trembling, carefulness, and astonishment. Now, in ordinary cases, the daily meals are partaken by good men with cheerfulness and gratitude. The change from Ezekiel's usual demeanour to that evident upon this occasion must certainly have awakened on the part of his companions not a little curiosity and inquiry. There was a typical signification in it, which he himself was ready to explain. There are times when anticipation of evil is justified, when its absence is unreasonable. The terrors, privations, and sufferings of the approaching siege of Jerusalem were pictured beforehand by the figurative, symbolical action of the prophet.

I. THE OCCASION OF THESE TREMBLING FOREBODINGS. It was the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the land of Israel who were about to suffer. And their sufferings were the just reward of their unfaithfulness and rebelliousness. Threats and warnings had not been spared. The prophet at least believed that these threats were not empty and vain, that the day was approaching when they should be fulfilled. The siege of the rebellious city was at hand.

II. THE SYMPATHETIC CHARACTER OF THESE TREMBLING FOREBODINGS. Like a true minister of God, Ezekiel thought and felt less for himself than for his people. He had personally no special reason for alarm. So far as his own safety was concerned, there was no reason why he should cherish anticipations of evil. But in his own mind he identified himself with Jerusalem, with Israel. He could not separate and isolate himself from those to whom he was bound by ties of kindred and of common indebtedness to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. If his people suffered, he would suffer with them. Even if they showed a sinful indifference to their state and prospects, he would cherish a just sensitiveness. If disaster were approaching, he would not be content to secure his own safety and to regard their fate with heartless unconcern.

III. THE INTENTION OF THESE TREMBLING FOREBODINGS. Ezekiel was no mere prophet of evil. He did not conceive himself to have accomplished his mission in predicting the coming evil, and then abandoning the people to the consequences of their sin. He warned them in the hope that they would profit by his warning, turn from their evil ways, and seek that national disaster might be averted, or, at all events, in the hope that individuals might repent and flee from the wrath to come. His mission was one of benevolence.

IV. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THESE TREMBLING FOREBODINGS. The siege which Ezekiel foretold came to pass; the people, in the famine which ensued, ate their bread with carefulness, and drank their water with astonishment; the cities were laid waste, and the land became a desolation. All the predictions of the Lord's prophet were verified. The false security of the people was proved to be false and baseless; their hope of immunity from judgment was frustrated. The righteous judgment of God was vindicated, and that in a most awful manner.

V. THE ULTIMATE ISSUE OF THESE TREMBLING FOREBODINGS. The fear of the prophet, the calamity and terror which overtook the people, had a moral, a religious end, which in large measure was secured. The authority of the God of Israel was asserted. The vanity of rebellion against him was demonstrated. The attention of all concerned was directed to the principles of true religion as the foundation alike of national and of individual well-being. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord."—T.

Vers. 22—28.—*The human proverb and the Divine.* National proverbs embody national thinking, national sentiments, national habits. They sometimes convey counsels of wisdom. But they are sometimes superficial and all but valueless. As in the case here recorded, such frivolous and misleading sayings need to be replaced and substituted by the dictates of inspiration, of infallible wisdom, and undying truth.

I. A SPECIOUS PROVERB OF HUMAN WISDOM. 1. Its *import.* This was twofold—it asserted the postponement indefinitely of righteous judgment, and the failure of authorized prophecy. No doubt retribution was deferred; but this, which was a sign of Divine forbearance, was interpreted as a proof that judgment there was none, on earth or in heaven. No doubt the warnings were uttered long before the calamity overtook the people; and, in consequence, the threatened, the unbelievers, instead of using the opportunity to repent and reform, abused it to their own condemnation. 2. Its *plausibility.* It is described as a "flattering divination;" for it was intended to fall in with and to encourage the carelessness, the impenitence, and the unspirituality of men. 3. Its *illusiveness.* The opponents of the inspired prophet had but a "vain vision" to boast of. Time unmasks all false, deceitful appearances; in a short time it was seen that the proverbial wisdom of the impenitent was utterly baseless, was indeed nothing but folly.

II. A VERACIOUS DECLARATION OF DIVINE COUNSELS. 1. The proverb dishonouring to God is exposed and refuted. "I will make this proverb to cease." Events should make its currency impossible. There is a destructive power in truth—it shatters illusions to pieces. Great swelling words of vanity collapse when they encounter the simple but authoritative utterances of Divine truth. 2. The truthfulness of the Lord's prophets is established. Every word is fulfilled. Most unlikely events come to pass in accordance with prophetic utterance. God speaks, and the pride of the haughty is humbled, and things that are not vanquish things that are. The faithful admonitions of the Lord's servants are proved to be just and wise. 3. A new proverb is created by the action of Divine providence. "There shall none of my words be deferred any more." The time came, and came speedily, when this could not be questioned. And what happened in the days of Ezekiel has happened wherever God has spoken. For us it is chiefly of practical concern to notice that he who came from God and went to God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, uttered forth the Divine mind and will with a unique completeness; and that though heaven and earth shall pass away, his words shall not pass away.—T.

Vers. 1—16.—*The dramatic form of prophecy.* It is of the first moment that men should have right and adequate impressions of the truth. A man's life is properly moulded through his intelligence. His intelligence moulds his tastes, feeds his emotions, inspires his purposes, directs his life. Clear convictions of truth and duty possess unspeakable value.

I. MORAL OBTUSENESS IN MEN IS A GRIEF TO GOD. Eyes have been conferred for the sole reason that men may see; and ears, that they may hear. Yet men often misuse and neglect them. By indulgence in vicious likings they wilfully blind the inner eye and make deaf the inner ear. "None are so blind as those who will not see." "If the eye be evil, the whole body is full of darkness." If the sole channel of truth be choked, the man is the victim of falsehood. This is a grief to God, and he adopts a thousand methods to illumine the dark understanding. He sometimes blinds the eye of sense that the eye of the mind may open. He finds his way into the heart of men through some other avenue hitherto untried; for he who made man will find some method of access to his soul.

II. A NOVEL FORM OF PROPHECY—A DRAMA IN ACTUAL LIFE. Instruction, as a rule, is addressed to the ear; but for the deaf and for infants it is often addressed to the eye. So, in olden times, God often gave to men an object-lesson. We have the narrative of such an event in the fourth chapter, where Ezekiel was required to lie on one side of his body during three hundred and ninety days. When Zedekiah the prophet was summoned to the court of Ahab, to give counsel respecting the projected war, Zedekiah entered the king's presence furnished with horns of iron. The appearance of these was to add impressiveness to the prophet's words. So when Paul was journeying for the last time to Jerusalem, Agabus, a prophet, came to him at Cæsarea, and, taking Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet, then added, "So shall the Jews bind the man that owneth this girdle." This appeal to the eye by living action strengthens conviction in the minds of spectators of the truth and importance of the message. By every possible method God accommodated himself to the necessities of the people for whom he still designed kindness.

III. MEDIATORIAL SERVICE BY MAN FOR MEN. The labour of a true prophet is no sinecure. It is the hardest of toil. He must have no care for himself in his solicitude for others. To be a true prophet he must be like-minded with God. The self-forgetful, self-sacrificing love of God must flow in *his* veins. He must be completely devoted to the good of those to whom he is sent. No labour must be accounted arduous, no pain severe, in order to success in his undertaking. *Now* Ezekiel is required to array himself in an emigrant's attire; provide himself with the usual baggage for foreign travel; take his staff in his hand; carry his equipment on his shoulder; leave his home in the sight of men, yet with face veiled; and dig a hole through the city wall, to secure exit from the city. To do all this in the town of Tel-Abib would excite public attention, surprise, and wonder. The people would consider the prophet mad. Yet *this* was the very end God had in view, viz. to arrest attention and to produce reflection. This strange action would indicate the strength of Ezekiel's faith, and strong faith awakens faith in others. He was willing, like Paul, "to become all things, so that by any means he might save some."

IV. INQUIRY LEADS TO CLEARER REVELATION OF TRUTH. The knowledge which a man gets in response to inquiry is more appreciated and more pondered than *that* which is given unasked. A great triumph is gained over the sluggishness of our nature when a spirit of inquiry is stirred within. If a man desires knowledge, it is an omen for good; it is the dawn of blessing. Clearer and fuller information can come through the gateway of the ear than through the gateway of the eye. The people to whom Ezekiel addressed himself were those of the Captivity at Tel-Abib. They were fostering a false hope (aided by vain counsels sent from brethren in Jerusalem) that their captivity would be very brief, and that new political combinations would result in speedy restoration to Palestine. Thus their minds would be disturbed; their simple trust was diverted from God, and they were losing the spiritual benefit which the exile was intended to bring. Inquiry after the truth would lead the way to mental tranquillity and submission. The clear fulfilment of prophecy would strengthen faith in God.

V. FOLLY OF ALL EFFORT TO EVADE GOD. In the fourteenth verse we read, "I will scatter toward every wind all that are about to help him, and all his bands." This announcement would embrace the Egyptian host which came to help Zedekiah, as well as his own people. To resist Jehovah is to resist the granite rock. A single word from God ought to suffice in order to obtain our readiest obedience. Patriotism is an excellent virtue in its place, but very often it is only a poor admixture of vanity and selfish ambition Pious trust and pious obedience are far superior. To be wise we must always be on the side of God. God's will is supreme, and, in the end, is irresistible. Oneness with that will is life and peace.

VI. To KNOW GOD—THIS IS THE FINAL ISSUE. It is instructive to observe how that *this* is the frequent refrain. "They shall know that I am the Lord." This was a lesson which the Hebrews would not learn in days of prosperity; therefore they were led into the deep shades of adversity to acquire it. The discipline, though severe, was successful. Experience is an excellent school, though a costly one. It cured them of their foolish belief in idols, and wrought in them the conviction that the unseen Jehovah alone was God. Yet in many persons this knowledge was only intellectual. It did not command their affection, nor draw after it spontaneous service. The knowledge of God which becomes to us salvation, is an experimental knowledge. It is knowledge of God as *our* God—our reconciled Father. We know him with personal intimacy. We admit him to the inmost chamber of our hearts. He becomes Emmanuel, *i.e.* God with us—God in us. We grow up into his likeness. We imitate his qualities. We yield to him *will* and *heart* and *life*.—D.

Vers. 21—28.—*The snare of unbelief.* Faith has the power to make the distant near. It obliterates distance of time and space. But unbelief *reverses* the effect. It looks in at the wrong end of the telescope, and reduces realities to a mere speck. Unbelief corrupts all blessing; it makes sour the very cream of God's kindness. "Because judgment is not speedily executed," incorrigible rebellion makes a mock of retribution.

I. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF DISTANT JUDGMENT IS GREAT KINDNESS. The ancient Greeks had an adage: "The gods have feet of wool." But this does not describe the character of the living God. Instead of overtaking men hastily, "he is slow to anger." He does not willingly afflict. "The axe is often laid at the root of the tree," and *that* for a long spell; and if repentance and fruitfulness appear, the sentence is gladly revoked. The aim and purpose of our God are not destruction, but restoration. If it is within the range of possibility to awake the slumbering conscience, and save the man, God will do it. To announce beforehand ordained judgments is kindness infinite.

II. DEFERRED JUDGMENT OFTEN LEADS TO MISPLACED CONFIDENCE. The best blessings, when corrupted, become our direst curses. Neither the bitter experience of sin, though long-continued, nor the royal clemency of God, produces any beneficial effect on some men. They seem deaf to every appeal of prudence, insensible to every overture of kindness. All tender feeling appears to have vanished; they have reached already a state of hopeless reprobation. If the severity of justice for a moment should relax, they put it down to cowardice, or weakness, or irresolution. They say, "We shall have peace, though we walk after the imagination of our own hearts." "Give a loose rein to lust," say they; "God doth not regard us."

III. UNBELIEF PUTS FAR OFF THE DAY OF RECKONING. Its shallow line of reasoning is this: "No punishment has fallen upon us as yet. To-day will be as yesterday, and to-morrow as to-day. Probably," say they, "punishment will not come at all; or, if it should, it is so far away that for all practical purposes we may disregard it." There is a strong force of inertia in every man's nature. What *has* been, he thinks, will continue to be. "Where is the promise of his coming?" The wish becomes father to the thought, that punishment is dubious, problematic—a mere ghost of probability. All the evidence of Divine rule and Divine interposition unbelief rejects as hypothetical craze. What cannot be seen and handled and touched unbelief despises as unreal.

IV. THE HOUR OF DOOM AT LENGTH SUDDENLY STRIKES. To men it often seems a sudden event; not so to God. He has seen the elements preparing stage by stage, and "suddenness" forms no part of his experience. So it has been with all the great calamities that have overtaken men. In the period of Noah's deluge, men saw no prognostication of coming danger. "They bought, they sold, they married, they were given in marriage, until the very day that Noah entered into the ark." On the day of Sodom's doom, the sun rose over the eastern hills with his usual splendour and tranquillity; yet before noon the smoke of the devastation rose and smothered in silence the cries of its dying population. "So shall the coming of the Son of man be." When profligate men least expect it the storm shall break upon their heads. Whensoever the long-suffering kindness of God is made an occasion of fresh licence, be quite

sure that retribution is not far away. "In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."—D.

Vers. 1—16.—*A parabolic appeal to a rebellious people.* "The word of the Lord also came unto me, saying, Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house," etc. "Now begin the amplifications," says Hengstenberg, "the marginal notes, so to speak, on the great text in ch. viii.—xi., which extend to ch. xix., and these terminate in a song, corresponding to the song in the first group in ch. vii. The approaching catastrophe of Jerusalem forms the central point throughout. The prophet is inexhaustible in the announcement of this, as the false patriotism was inexhaustible in its announcements of salvation." We are not certain whether this parable of Ezekiel's removing was really acted by him or only visional. But we incline to the opinion that it was internal and visional, for the following reasons: 1. This communication (vers. 1—16) refers chiefly to the king and the people in Jerusalem, while the prophet dwelt at Tel-Abib. So that so far as the people principally interested in it are concerned, it would be as impressive to them if it took place in the region of the prophet's soul as if it were outwardly enacted in a country far away from them. 2. The prophet is represented as dwelling in the midst of the people to whom this communication chiefly applies, and as doing these things in their sight; but seeing that he actually dwelt at Tel-Abib on the Chebar, we think that his dwelling and acting spoken of in this chapter must have been visional. 3. If it had been an actual and external occurrence it would not, at least in one respect, have well answered the end designed. That end was to set forth the truth that the king and the people in Jerusalem should be carried into captivity. But inasmuch as Ezekiel was already in exile, if he actually went forth thus from his Babylonian residence, the action would more fitly symbolize the return of the exiles to their own land than the carrying of others into exile. Such a return many of the exiles were hoping for and expecting speedily; and the prophet was not likely to be told to do anything that would encourage the vain expectation. Jeremiah had already written to them, exhorting them to build houses and settle peacefully in the land of their captivity, because they should not return to their own land until seventy years of exile were accomplished. For these reasons we incline to the opinion that the doings of vers. 3—7 were not external and actual, but internal and visional; but, as we have said above, we are not certain of this. Of this we feel assured, that, if they were visional, they were impressed upon the mind of Ezekiel with all the vividness of actual transactions. But, happily, this question does not affect the permanent and universal teachings of the incident. Notice—

I. THE DEPLORABLE MORAL CONDITION OF REBELLIOUS SINNERS. "Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house," etc. 1. *A condition of sad moral obtuseness.* "Which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not" (cf. Deut. xxix. 4; Isa. vi. 9, 10). The will of God was made known unto them, and they had the mental and moral faculties which are necessary for its apprehension, yet they did not apprehend it; they misapprehended or disregarded it. "When men see, hear, and do not profit by their seeing or hearing, then they neither see nor hear in Scripture sense." In this respect how great is the moral insensibility, not only of the openly profane, but of many who attend the public means of grace! They unite in forms of public worship without any spiritual improvement; they hear the ministry of redemptive truth without any saving impression. They "have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not." 2. *Moral obtuseness arising from persistent wickedness.* "For they are a rebellious house." Their moral insensibility was a consequence of their habitual sin. "The cause is all from themselves; the darkness of the understanding is owing to the stubbornness of the will." The practice of sin blunts the spiritual susceptibilities, tends to destroy the capacity for receiving religious impressions or perceiving spiritual truth; and when fully developed it ends in moral sensibility, and makes a man "past feeling."

II. THE PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF THE DIVINE EFFORTS FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE WICKED. "Therefore, thou son of man, prepare thee stuff for removing," etc. (ver. 3). Many means had been tried to lead them to repentance, but without a satisfactory result. Still, God does not yet abandon them, but directs that other means shall be tried, saying, "It may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house." The truth must "be set before their eyes," says Hengstenberg, "in rough, palpable, overpowering reality, if it is to find entrance to their minds, and succeed in emancipating them from those dreams of the future which are preventing their repentance. . . . The greater the weakness of their eyes, the more conspicuous must be the exhibition of the truth." God is unwilling to abandon the wicked to their sin and doom. He has long patience with them, sends to them messenger after messenger, and employs means after means, both various and oft-repeated, in order to lead them to turn from sin to himself. In illustration and confirmation of this, see ch. xxxiii. 11; Jer. xliv. 4; Hos. xi. 8, 9; Neh. ix. 26—31; Matt. xxi. 33—44. And in the incident before us, he not only addresses to them this stirring parable to arrest their attention and awaken their consideration, but he also instructs the prophet to make known to them the interpretation of it, that even the most indifferent and the most insensible might be made acquainted with the truths communicated.

III. THE EXTRAORDINARY DIVINE APPEAL TO THE INCONSIDERATE AND REBELLIOUS PEOPLE. This parable (vers. 3—7) was the Lord's appeal to the insensible and rebellious people. It does not require any exposition from us, as the inspired interpretation is here given (vers. 8—16), and this also is interpreted by its remarkable fulfilment in history. But we may mark the several stages of the mournful history here predicted, the fulfilment of which is recorded in 2 Kings xxv.; Jer. xxxix. 1—10; lii. 1—30. 1. *Here is a picture of the king and people of Jerusalem going into captivity.* (Vers. 3, 4, 10, 11.) "The stuff for removing," or "baggage of the emigrant" (vers. 3, 4), "is the equipment made by one who enters on a journey never to return." And "as they that go forth into captivity," or "like the removals of the emigrant" (ver. 4), signifies, according to Hengstenberg, "in the costume and with the manner of emigrants; 'with a bag on the shoulder and a staff in the hand;' 'sad and with drooping head.'" Thus Ezekiel was to typify the departure of prince and people into exile. 2. *Here is a picture of going into captivity by sorrowful and stealthy flight.* (Vers. 5—7, 12.) He is to go forth in the twilight so as to elude the vigilance of the enemies, and with his face covered so as not to see the beloved land which he is leaving. And all the accounts of the flight agree that it was made in fright and furtively under cover of night. 3. *Here is a veiled announcement of the king's deprivation of sight and an explicit declaration of his destination as an exile.* (Ver. 13.) According to Josephus ('Ant.,' x. vii. 2), Ezekiel sent an account of this prophecy to Jerusalem to strengthen the influence of Jeremiah with the king, who was personally considerably disposed to heed the counsel of that prophet. But the king compared the announcements of the two prophets, and finding that while Jeremiah said he should be carried in bonds to Babylon, Ezekiel said he should not see it, he disbelieved both of them. And yet the event showed that both of them were true. The king was carried as a prisoner to Babylon, but he did not see it, for Nebuchadnezzar had put out his eyes at Riblah in the land of Hamath. 4. *Here is a declaration that the king should be left without defence or helper.* "I will scatter toward every wind all that are about him to help him, and all his bands" (ver. 14). And the sacred historian tells us that when the army of the Chaldeans overtook the fleeing king "in the plains of Jericho, all his army were scattered from him." 5. *Here is the intention expressed to spare a small remnant for the acknowledgment of the supremacy of Jehovah and the confession of their sins.* (Vers. 15, 16.) Only "a few men," or "men of number," should be left, *i.e.* so few that they might be easily counted; and they should be spared in order that they might acknowledge the many aggravated and persistent sins of the people, which had led to these stern judgments, and so vindicate the justice of God in the infliction of them. And by these judgments they would become convinced that Jehovah is the living and the true God. "They shall know that I am the Lord." These words, which "recur as a refrain" in these prophecies, we have already considered (in ch. vi. 7, 10).

CONCLUSION. Learn: 1. *The peril of disregarding the Word of the Lord.* Such conduct, persisted in, leads to spiritual blindness and deafness. 2. *The obligation of the good to put forth persistent efforts for the conversion of the wicked.* 3. *The importance of employing various means for the conversion of the wicked.*—W. J.

Vers. 17—20.—*Deprivations caused by sin.* "Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking," etc. This paragraph was addressed to Ezekiel's fellow-exiles. "Say unto the people of the land;" *i.e.* of Chaldea. The design was to discourage the false expectations of the captives, who were looking forward to an early season of prosperity for their native land, in which they hoped to share. To this end the prophet shows to them that, in respect to their fellow-countrymen in Jerusalem, there would be a cutting off of the physical comforts of life, great anxiety and distress of mind, and sad devastation of both cities and country, and all these things because of the sins of the people, or "for the violence of all who dwell in it." Several things call for attention.

I. SIN DEPRIVING SINNERS OF THE PHYSICAL COMFORTS OF LIFE. "Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness; and say unto the people of the land, Thus saith the Lord God of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and of the land of Israel [or, 'in the land of Israel']; They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment." These words point to the cutting off of the comforts of life, and the possession of the mere necessaries thereof. But not always does sin produce consequences such as this. Sin and secular prosperity have often gone hand-in-hand (cf. Gen. xiii. 10, 13; Ps. lxxiii. 3—12; Luke xii. 16—20; xvi. 19—26). But in these cases the prosperity was precedent to the Divine judgment or to the full development of sin. When that development had taken place, and that judgment was being exercised, there was a striking reversal of circumstances in each case. In the siege of Jerusalem, to which our text points, physical comforts and luxuries disappeared, and long before its close men deemed themselves fortunate if they could secure bread and water. And in our age the wicked may prosper in the world and increase in riches; but in the time of retribution, whenever it arrives, sin will be found injurious to all the true interests of man. Sin often strips the sinner of physical comforts, and even of the bare necessaries of life. Drunkenness, gluttony, indolence, wastefulness, bring many a person and many a family to abject poverty and want (cf. Prov. vi. 9—11; xix. 15; xxiii. 21; xxiv. 30—34).

II. SIN DEPRIVING SINNERS OF PEACE AND SERENITY OF SPIRIT. "Son of man, eat thy bread with quaking, and drink thy water with trembling and with carefulness. . . . They shall eat their bread with carefulness, and drink their water with astonishment." They would eat even the necessaries of life, not in peace and comfort, but in anxiety and alarm. Their distress may have arisen from fear lest their scanty supplies of food should fail them, and so they ate "their bread with carefulness." And to this was joined terror of their enemies who surrounded them, causing them to take of the sustenance of life "with quaking, trembling, and astonishment." It is of the nature of sin, when it is developed, to destroy peace and calmness of mind, and to produce terror and distress. "The wicked are like the troubled sea," etc. (Isa. lvii. 20, 21). Without doubt we may often find the wicked in their sad career untroubled either by guilt or fear; but for every one the time of awakening comes, and with it security departs and terror arrives. "When the pleasure has been tasted and is gone," says Mr. Froude, "and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin which it has wrought, then the furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow." "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." "The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth."

III. SIN DESOLATING THE LAND IN WHICH IT WAS COMMITTED. "That her land may be desolate from all that is therein, because of the violence of all them that dwell therein. And the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate." Instead of "That her land may be desolate from all that is therein," the margin reads, "from the fulness thereof." The meaning seems to be that the land would be "stripped of all its inhabitants and of all its wealth." The land of Israel was once fair and fertile—"a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills," etc. (Deut. viii. 7—9). In the time of Solomon the Tyrians received large quantities of corn and wine and oil from this fruitful land (1 Kings v. 11; 2 Chron. ii. 10). But what is its condition now? And what has been its condition for ages past? "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." "The plain of Jordan, well-watered everywhere, and as the garden of the Lord" (Gen. xiii. 10) is not the only example of fertility, being changed into barrenness because of the sins of the people. Other lands have had a similar fate, but by a different process. There are sins by which lands are still laid waste. Indolence, effeminacy, self-indulgence, delight in war, and social oppression, in every age produce impoverishment and desolation in any country where they prevail.

IV. DIVINE JUDGMENT BECAUSE OF SIN LEADING SINNERS TO KNOW THAT JEHOVAH IS THE ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD. "And ye shall know that I am the Lord" (see our notes on these words in ch. vi. 7, 10; xi. 10).—W. J.

Vers. 21—28.—*The word of the Lord discredited and vindicated.* "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel?" etc.

I. THE WORD OF THE LORD DISCREDITED. 1. *It was discredited in various degrees.* (1) By some it was entirely disbelieved. "Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?" The reference in this proverb is to the predictions of the Divine judgments against Jerusalem and its inhabitants, which had been made by Jeremiah long ago. And the proverb is a jeering expression, indicating the opinion that these predictions had totally failed. These sceptics argued within themselves and amongst themselves, that because the fulfilment of the threatened judgment was delayed, the threatening itself was untrue. "The experience of God's forbearance had destroyed their apprehension of his truthfulness." This sinful misinterpretation of the Divine dealings is not confined to that generation or to that people. We discover the same presumptuous unbelief in Ps. l. 21, "These things hast thou done; and I kept silence," etc.; in Eccles. viii. 11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily," etc.; and in 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4, "There shall come in the last days scoffers," etc. What an abuse is this of the patience of the Lord God! What a base perversion of his forbearance and grace (cf. Rom. ii. 4—11; 2 Pet. iii. 9)! (2) By others the word of the Lord was discredited by indefinitely postponing its fulfilment. "Son of man, behold, the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off." These persons argued that, because the fulfilment of the threatenings of Jeremiah had been delayed so long, that fulfilment was yet far off. They concluded that the prophetic visions would not be realized in their time, and therefore they need not be troubled by them. 2. *It was discredited in open expression.* "Behold, the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days," etc. (ver. 27). In the case of those who entirely discredited the word of the Lord by the prophet, the terms in which they expressed their disbelief had become proverbial. "What is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel?" etc. (ver. 22). This sentiment, common among the people, "had been expressed in a pointed sentence, . . . and straightway became popular as a watchword, which was taken up on every occasion against the true prophet." Their disbelief of the message of the Lord by his prophet, and their derision of that prophet, were not veiled, but openly paraded by the people. As Greenhill says, "This wicked speech was become a proverb; it passed through the mouths of all sorts, young, old, great, small, learned, ignorant; it was in the city and country, a proverb in the land of Israel." Disbelief had grown daring and defiant. 3. *This discredit was plausibly encouraged.* False prophets, by means of vain visions and flattering divinations, had fostered disbelief of the stern announcements of Jeremiah, the true prophet of Jehovah (ver. 24). These men had prophesied smooth things to the credulous house of Israel—credulous, that is, of such announcements as harmonized with their inclinations. So Ahab believed the smooth-speaking false prophets to his own death, while he hated and imprisoned the faithful Micaiah, the prophet of the Lord Jehovah (1 Kings xxii.). And the false prophets of Jeremiah's age encouraged the presumptuous security of the people until that security was shattered by disaster and ruin.

II. THE WORD OF THE LORD VINDICATED BY HIMSELF. 1. *By its continued proclamation.* The people of Jerusalem probably thought by their disbelief and derision to put to silence the word of the Lord by Jeremiah his prophet. But God still speaks by him, and by Ezekiel also. "Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord God," etc. (ver. 23). "I am the Lord: I will speak," etc. (ver. 25). "Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God," etc. (ver. 28). In this way God speaks again and again to this unbelieving and rebellious people. He will not leave himself without faithful witnesses, who will speak his word even to the most sceptical and stubborn of men (cf. ch. ii. 3—7; iii. 4—11). 2. *By its full and speedy fulfilment.* The Lord here declares that: (1) His word should be fulfilled speedily. "Say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision. . . . I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord God. . . . There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God." And, as Hengstenberg says, "the announcement of the prophet has passed into fulfilment in a terrible manner. Scarcely five years elapsed when Jerusalem with its temple lay in ruins; and those who had filled their belly with the east wind of their proud hopes of the future were either lost or envied the dead." (2) His word should be fulfilled completely. "The days are at hand, and the effect of every vision." The full "contents of every prediction" would be brought to pass. The unbelieving and rebellious people probably thought that even if things came to the worst, they could not be so bad as in the prophetic representations, that Jeremiah had exaggerated the troubles that were coming upon the nation. But "the word of every vision" was at hand. No partial fulfilment was about to take place. Every word of prophetic prediction was to be realized. 3. *By putting to silence the false prophets who had discredited it.* "There shall no more be any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel." The events that were drawing so near would confound these prophesiers of smooth things. The complete fulfilment of the visions of the true prophet would effectually stop the mouths of the false ones.

CONCLUSION. Our subject presents to us: 1. *An assurance of the certainty of the fulfilment of the Word of the Lord.* (Cf. Numb. xxiii. 19; Ps lxxxix. 34; Matt. v. 18; xxiv. 35, Luke xvi. 17; 1 Pet. i. 23—25.) 2. *Warning against unbelief of the Word of the Lord, and against the false security arising therefrom.* The punishment denounced against sin will certainly be inflicted unless the sinner turn from his evil way. 3. *Encouragement to trust the Word of the Lord.* Its promises are true and reliable. The hopes which it inspires are not delusive. "For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the Yea: wherefore also through him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ver. 1.—Another interval follows, and then a fresh and fuller burst of inspiration, manifestly in close connection with ch. xii. 21—28, and to be read in combination with Jer. xxiii., which, as Jeremiah was in communication with the exiles (Jer. xxix. 1), Ezekiel may probably have seen. There were false prophets and prophetesses among the exiles as well as in Jerusalem, and an utterance is now found for his long-pent-up indignation.

Vers. 2, 3.—Son of man, prophesy, etc. The sin of the men whom Ezekiel denounced was that they prophesied out of their own hearts (Jer. xiv. 14; xxiii. 16, 26), and followed their own spirit instead of the Spirit of Jehovah. All was human and of the earth. Not a single fact in the future, not a single eternal law governing both the future and the past, was brought to light by it. To one who was conscious that he had a message which he had not devised himself, and which he had not been taught by men (Gal. i. 12); that he had no selfish by-ends in what he said and did; that he was risking peace, reputation, life itself, for the truth revealed to him,—nothing could be more repulsive than this claim to have seen a vision of Jehovah, by men who had in reality seen nothing. For foolish prophets, read, with the stronger Hebrew, *the prophets, the fools*, the words deriving their force from a kind of paronomasia of alliteration. The *nabiim* are also the *n'balim*.

Ver. 4.—Like the foxes in the deserts, etc. The points of comparison are manifold. The fox is cunning (Luke xiii. 32, where the term is applied to Herod Antipas). It spoils the vine and its fruits (Song of Sol. ii. 15); it burrows among ruins (Neh. iv. 3; Lam. v. 18). So the false prophets were crafty, laid waste the vineyard of the Lord of hosts (Isa. v. 7), made their profit out of the ruin of Israel, and made that ruin worse. The 'Reineke Fuchs,' in satirizing the monks and priests of the sixteenth century under the same comparison, presents a curious, though probably unconscious, analogue. In Matt. vii. 15 and Acts xx. 29 wolves appear as the types of the false prophet.

Ver. 5.—The verse contains two distinct images. There were breaches in the walls of Jerusalem, literally and spiritually, and the false prophets had not been as "repairers of the breach" (Isa. lviii. 12; Ps. cvi. 23). The hedge of the vineyard of Israel had been broken through (Isa. v. 5), and they had done nothing to restore it (ch. xxii. 30). The day of battle, the day of the Lord, had come, and they were betraying the people instead of helping.

Ver. 6.—**The Lord saith.** The verb is that specially used for the utterance of prophets, and the deceivers used it without the authority of a true mission. **For they have made others** (or, *men*) **to hope**, etc., as in the Authorized Version and Revised Version, read, with the margin of Revised Version, *they hope to confirm their word*, taking the verb as in Ps. cxix. 43, 49; Job vi. 11, *et al.*). So the Vulgate, *perseveraverunt confirmare.* Through deceiving others, they came to deceive themselves, and were really expecting a fulfilment.

Ver. 9.—**Mine hand shall be, etc.** After Ezekiel's manner, the thought of ver. 6 is repeated in an altered form in vers. 7, 8. What had been a statement appears as a question to which there could be but one answer. The prophet, as it were, cross-examines his rivals. Could they deny the charge? Was not every word of it true? Then, after the statement of the sin of the false prophets, comes the proclamation of the punishment. The hand of Jehovah would be upon them for evil and not for good. **In the assembly of my people.** The Hebrew word indicates not a large popular gathering, but a secret council of those who deliberate together to carry out their plans (Ps. lxxxix. 7; cxi. 1; Jer. vi. 11). The prophets who had acted together, and been looked up to by the people as forming such a council, should lose that position of authority. The words that follow point to a yet lower degradation. They should be in the strictest sense of the word excommunicated. The city of Jerusalem, perhaps every city of Judah, had its register of citizens. In such a register were inscribed also the names of proselytes of other races (Ps. lxxxvii. 6), and so men came to think of a like register as kept by the King of kings, containing the names of those who were heirs of the "life" of the true Israel (Exod. xxxii. 32; Isa. iv. 3; Dan. xii. 1). In neither of those registers, the earthly and the heavenly (but stress is probably laid upon the former), shall the false prophets find a place. Ezra ii. 62 gives an example of the use made of such registers on the return from the Captivity. One notes the contrast between the "*my* people" which recognizes Israel as still the heritage of Jehovah, and the "*thy* people" used in ch. iii. 11 of the rebellious house of the Captivity. For the false prophets there should be no return to the land of Israel such as that which the prophet anticipated for the faithful and the penitent (ch. xxxvii. 21; comp. Isa. lvii. 13). Here there is no specific mention of the name being struck out. The prophet contemplates a new register, in which their names will never even have appeared.

Ver. 10.—**Peace, when there was no peace.** This, as in Micah iii. 5; Jer. vi. 14; xxiii. 17; Zech. x. 2, was the root-evil of the false prophet's work. He lulled men into a false security, and so narcotized their consciences. **One built up a wall.** The imagery starts from the picture of a ruined city already implied in vers. 4 and 5, and expands into a parable in which we note a parallelism (1) to Isaiah's picture of dishonest and unsafe building (xxx. 13); (2) to our Lord's parable at the end of the sermon on the mount (Matt. vii. 24, 25; Luke vi. 47—49). With an incisive sarcasm, Ezekiel describes what we should call the "scamp-work" of their spiritual building. They profess to be "repairers of the breach" (Isa. lviii. 12) in the walls of the spiritual Zion, and this is how they set about it. *One built up a wall.* This may point to a false prophet, but the "one" (Hebrew, "he") is probably indefinite, like the French *on*, equivalent to "some one." Some scheme is devised, an Egyptian alliance or the like, to which the people look for safety. It is, as in the margin of the Authorized Version, a "slight wall," such as was used for partition walls inside houses. They make it do duty as an outside wall (*kir* in ver. 12). It has no sure "footings," and materials and workmanship are alike defective. The false prophets would smear it over with untempered mortar (the Hebrew word is found only here and in ch. xxii. 28, and is probably an example of Ezekiel's acquaintance with the technical vocabulary of his time)—with a stucco or plaster, which is hardly better than whitewash (compare the "whitened" or plastered wall or sepulchre of Matt. xxiii. 27; Luke xi. 44; Acts xxiii. 3), used to hide its defects and give it a semblance of solidity. They come, that is, with smooth words and promises of peace.

Ver. 11.—In words which would almost seem to have been in our Lord's thoughts in Matt. vii. 25, we have the picture of an Eastern storm, torrents of rain passing into hail (LXX., λίθοι πετρόβολοι), accompanied by a tornado of irresistible violence (compare like pictures in Exod. ix. 22; Josh.

x. 11; Isa. xxx. 30; xxviii. 2, 17). And when the disaster comes men will turn to those who professed to be master-builders and repairers of the breach, with derision, and ask, "Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed?" And then men shall see that through all this it is Jehovah's hand that has been working. It is he who "rends" the wall; he who "brings it down to the ground;" he who "accomplishes his wrath" (vers. 13—15). That shall be the end of the false "visions of peace."

Ver. 17.—Set thy face against the daughters of thy people. Here we note that the formula, "*thy* people," of ch. iii. 11 reappears. The section which follows (vers. 17—23) throws an interesting side-light on the position of women in the religious life of Israel. For good as for evil, their influence was stronger there than in most other nations. Miriam had led the way (Exod. xv. 21), and had been followed by Deborah (Judg. v. 4). Huldah had been almost as prominent in Josiah's reformation as Hilkiah the high priest (2 Kings xxii. 14—20; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 22). It was but natural that there should be women on the other side also, guiding their own sex; and it is probable that Ezekiel had in his thoughts some special leaders who headed the women of Jerusalem in their opposition to Jeremiah, as afterwards at Pathros (Jer. xliv. 15). So, later on, we have the prophetess Noadiah heading the opposition to Nehemiah (Neh. vi. 14); and in the New Testament, on the one hand, Anna (Luke ii. 36) and the daughters of Philip (Acts xxi. 9), and on the other, the ill-regulated prophetesses of Corinth (1 Cor. xi. 5) and the woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess (Rev. ii. 20).

Ver. 18.—Woe to the women who sew pillows, etc. Ezekiel's minute description, though it is from a different standpoint, reminds us of that in Isa. iii. 18—26. In both cases there are the difficulties inseparable from the fact that he had seen what he describes, and that we have not; and that he uses words which were familiar enough then, but are now found nowhere else, so that (as in the case of the ἐξουσία of 1 Cor. xi. 10) we have to guess their meaning. The picture which he draws of a false prophetess is obviously taken from the life, and the dress, we can scarcely doubt, was one that belonged to her calling. The word for "sew" meets us in Gen. iii. 7; Job xvi. 15; Eccles. iii. 7; and the English is an adequate rendering. For the word rendered "pillows," the LXX. gives προσκεφάλαια, the Vulgate *pulvilli* (equivalent to "cushions"). The word here obviously denotes an article of dress, something fastened to the arms. For arm-holes, read *joints of the two hands*, which may mean either knuckles, wrists, or (as in the Revised Version) elbows. Possibly these may have been, like the phylacteries of Matt. xxiii. 5, cases containing charms or incantations, and used as amulets. Something analogous to, if not identical with, these ornaments, is found in the "seeress wreaths," and "divining garments" of Cassandra (Æsch., 'Agamemnon,' 1237—1242), and in the "garlands" or "fillets" of the Pythian priestess in Æsch., 'Eumen.,' 39. By some writers (Hävernick) the word has been taken, as, perhaps, in the Authorized Version, for "pillows" in the larger sense, either literally as used in wanton luxury, like the "tapestry" of Prov. vii. 16, or figuratively, like the "wall" of the preceding section, for counsels that lulled the conscience into the slumber of a false security. Strangely enough, the Hebrew noun rendered "armholes" has the pronominal suffix "*my* arms," or "*my* hands." Keil accepts this rendering, and explains it as meaning that the prophetesses sought to "bind the arms," *i.e.* to restrain the power of Jehovah. On the whole, it is safer to follow Ewald and Hitzig, as I have done above. **Make kerchiefs upon the head of every stature.** The word for "kerchiefs" is again unique, but is, perhaps, a variant of the word in Isa. iii. 22, and rendered "wimples" in the Authorized Version. There is a fair consensus of interpretations that it means, as "kerchief" means, some covering for the head, a veil that hangs down over it, like the Spanish mantilla. Its use is, perhaps, explained by the words that follow, which suggest that the veils were not worn by the prophetesses themselves, but by those who came to consult them. The former had, as it were, a whole wardrobe of such veils adapted to persons of various heights, so that in all cases it shrouded their whole form. We may, perhaps, read between the lines the thought that their utterances, like their veils, were adapted to suit every age and every taste. Analogous usages present themselves in the *tallith* of later Judaism, and the veil worn by the Roman augurs. Ezekiel paints, we may believe, what he had seen. And in those veils he had seen a net cast over the victims of the false prophetesses, a snare from which they could not escape. **Will ye hunt, etc.?** The question (that form is preferable to the affirmative of the margin of the Revised Version) is one of burning indignation. Omitting the words, "that come" (which have nothing in the Hebrew corresponding to them), the second clause will run, "Will ye make your own souls live?" and the question is explained by what follows. The prophetesses were living upon the credulity of the victims over whom they cast their nets.

Ver. 19.—Will ye pollute me, etc.? rather, with the Revised Version, *ye have profaned*, the interrogative form not being continued in the Hebrew. The prophet dwells with scorn on the miserable pay for which the prophetesses were guilty of so great a sin. Not for rewards of divination, like those of Balaam (Numb. xxii. 7), but for gifts like those bestowed on the harlot or the beggar (1 Sam. ii. 36; Hos. iii. 2)—for handfuls of barley and pieces of bread—they plied their wretched trade. For examples of the lower gifts in kind offered to prophets, compare those of Saul (1 Sam. ix. 8), of Jeroboam's wife (1 Kings xiv. 3), the false prophets in Micah iii. 5. And they did this in direct opposition to the will of Jehovah. They "slew," *i.e.* drew on to destruction, the souls that were meant for life. They "saved the souls alive," *i.e.* their own, which were worthy of death." That was the outcome of their "lying" divinations.

Ver. 20.—To make them fly, etc.; rather, with the Revised Version and Ewald, *as if they were birds*, carrying out the thought that the amulets on the arms of the prophetesses, and the veil cast over the heads of the votaries, were like the snare of the fowler. So the threat that follows, that the amulets should be torn off and the veil rent, is practically equivalent to the promise that the victims should be "delivered out of the snare of the fowler" (Ps. xci. 3; cxxiv. 7). They should no longer be in the power of those who traded on their credulity. They too shall know that he who speaks is indeed Jehovah.

Ver. 22.—Because with lies, etc. What specially stirred Ezekiel's indignation was that the false prophetesses saddened the hearts of the righteous (of those who looked to him and Jeremiah for guidance) with prophecies of evil, and deluded the evil-doer by false hopes, so that he should not turn from his evil way and live. For by promising him life, read, with the LXX., Vulgate, and Luther, and the Revised Version, *that he should live*, as he would do, if he turned from his wickedness (ch. iii. 21; xviii. 9, 17).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*Prophesying against the prophets.* I. THEY WHO TEACH OTHERS NEED THEMSELVES TO BE TAUGHT. No man is a perfect fountain of original knowledge. The teacher must not only be a scholar in his early days, he must be a learner all through his life. Moreover, in regard to his own experience he needs light and help. He is not merely a voice for other souls. He too has a soul which may be in darkness, even while he is striving to illumine his hearers. There is great danger in the professionalism of the pulpit. It comes to be taken for granted too readily that familiarity in handling the words of eternal life presupposes a healthy possession of that life. Preachers hear but few sermons. We want missionaries to the pulpit of our land, that the leaders of the people's religion may be led by the truth of God.

II. THEY WHO TEACH OTHERS MAY BE WHOLLY WRONG THEMSELVES. The professional prophets of Israel were many of them false prophets. They were not simply blind and in error. They made lying pretences to an inspiration which they did not possess, and they flattered people with vain visions which they had themselves cunningly devised. Their's was guilt of deepest dye. The teacher may fall into error unintentionally, for he is a fallible man; and then his mistake will not be culpable. But deception and moral failure are fatal sins. Surely every one who stands in the responsible position of a leader of others has a double motive for searching his own soul to see that he is not a false prophet.

III. THEY WHO TEACH OTHERS WILL BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT BY GOD. God has been watching the false prophets, and now Ezekiel is sent with a special message to them. What, then, is the advantage of prostituting the high mission of a servant of God for the sake of popular favour? The flatteries of a deluded multitude will not save the deceiver when he is called to account by his great Master. Nay, those flatteries will turn to curses when the victims of his base deception have their eyes open to the snare which he has laid for them. Of all pursuits, that of preaching simply for popularity is the most dangerous and degrading.

IV. THEY WHO TEACH OTHERS ONLY THEIR OWN IDEAS IN THE NAME OF GOD ARE THE MOST FALSE TEACHERS. The prophets of Jerusalem did not only flatter the people with popular teaching, they carried that teaching out of their own hearts, and then ascribed it to God. Now, the prophet was an inspired man, or he was nothing. His sole business was to declare the Divine message—"Thus saith the Lord." But in speaking only out of his own heart he knew that he had no such message. Yet by professing to be a prophet he claimed to be giving it. Here was his great sin. He was forging the name of God for his own inventions (see ver. 6). Similar is the sin of the preacher in a Christian pulpit who uses that vantage-ground to expound his own private ideas to the neglect of, or even in opposition to, the teachings of the Bible, and yet on the authority of the Christian ministry. This is treason against Christ.

Ver. 4.—*Foxes.* Ezekiel here likens the false prophets to foxes in waste places. This cutting comparison shows the daring of the true prophet, the extremity of the evil of false prophecy, and the crying need of exposure of this evil. There is a limit to the reserve of politeness when truth is dishonoured and God insulted by those whom a culpable charity still flatters with terms of friendliness. Christ called Herod a fox (Luke xiii. 32). Still, it needs the grace of Christ or the inspiration of an Ezekiel to be sure that one's use of such a title for a fellow-man is not misapplied. Consider in what respects false teachers may be compared to foxes.

I. FOXES ARE WILD ANIMALS. The comparison is with creatures untamed and practically untamable. Now, to all appearance the false prophets were very different, were the very opposite in manners and demeanour. They were the trained sophists of an ancient civilization, court preachers well skilled in the use of oily phrases, masters of polite diction. To call such men foxes would seem to be an extravagant insult. Nevertheless, beneath the gracious exterior there was the heart of the untamed animal. These teachers were not submissive to the guidance of the Spirit of God. All who refuse that guidance are wandering in the wilderness of life. They are not the sheep of God's flock, but like the foxes that range at large outside the fold.

II. FOXES ARE DESTRUCTIVE ANIMALS. Among the Hebrews they were not celebrated for the cunning for which they were famous in Greek fables, but for their wasting mischief. False teachers are compared to these ravenous beasts. The wilful teachers of error are like the wreckers who hang out false lights to draw ships to the rocks. The destruction is twofold. 1. *By driving from the true pastures.* Thus the flock is starved in the wilderness. Error draws men off from the wholesome food of truth. 2. *By direct injury.* The foxes tear and devour the lambs of the flock. Error has deadly fangs in spite of its gracious aspect.

III. FOXES HAUNT RUINOUS PLACES. Ezekiel imagines the foxes among ruins. False teaching flourishes when the Church has fallen into decay. A low moral tone prepares the way for error. If the soul were in a vigorous condition, the deceitfulness of an unworthy teacher would be speedily detected. It is only spiritual degeneracy that can give an opportunity for the religious charlatan.

IV. FOXES ROAM ABOUT IN THE DARK. They are creatures of the night. Deceitful teachers prey upon the ignorant and superstitious. Like the wild animals that only creep out under shelter of night, they prowl about in the shadows of dark times. They dread the day. Therefore the remedy is to be found in the spread of light. We cannot conquer error by directly refuting it so well as by fortifying people against it with a clear, strong teaching of truth. The foxes of error are on the look out for their victims. Let the shepherds of light be to the fore in keeping the pure truth of the New Testament well in the minds and hearts of the people.

Ver. 10.—*False peace.* "Peace; and there was no peace."

I. MEN CRAVE PEACE. A city is alarmed at the prospect of an attack. War stands with famine and plague as one of the three great scourges of man, and it is the greatest of the three. There is a worse war than that of man with his fellow—the war of sin against the soul, the war of the soul against God. This spiritual war wounds, slays, devastates, terrorizes. It is true that many who wage it never confess its hurtfulness, and even profess a joy in their condition. But when men retire into the silence of their own souls they must feel that the unrest within, which perhaps they do not yet ascribe to their sinful alienation from God, is a source of utter weariness, perhaps even of soul-agony. Cowper exclaims—

> "Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
> Some boundless contiguity of shade,
> Where rumour of oppression and deceit,

Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more!"

II. THERE ARE FALSE PROMISES OF PEACE. Ezekiel's contemporary prophets promised peace, though Jerusalem was threatened with destruction by the true prophets of God. 1. *The peace of unbelief.* The threatenings of judgment are discredited. Future punishment is regarded as an invention of the priests to keep their dupes in subjection. 2. *The peace of self-satisfaction.* The true prophets denounced sin; but the false prophets flattered with smooth words. There is a teaching which minimizes sin and guilt, and so lulls the alarmed conscience to sleep. 3. *The peace of presumption.* The false teachers taught their hearers to presume on the favour of God, and to assume that God would never suffer Jerusalem to be destroyed. So men now abuse the revelation of God's love by assuming that he will never smite in anger.

III. WORDS OF PEACE WILL NOT CREATE PEACE. The prophets might *say* "peace;" but there would be no more peace for all their reiteration of the pleasant message. Smooth doctrines do not make smooth facts. We may enjoy a rosy theology with no shadows in its ideas; but if there *are* shadows in life, they will not be softened thereby. The future is not shaped by our notions of what it should be; neither is real peace given in the present by mere words of peace. The need is deeper than that which any assuring language can satisfy. The unrest of the soul calls for an active, powerful pacifying. Till that is experienced the soul will be restless still.

IV. CHRIST ALONE BRINGS TRUE PEACE. There is a peace of God, but it is not to be got through flattering words and pleasant assurances. Perhaps storms and trouble will precede it. At least there must be the break-up of the false peace in the revolution of complete repentance. Then Christ will not only *speak* peace; he comes to *make* peace (Eph. ii. 15). His peace is brought about by his victory over sin, which is the one fundamental cause of war between the soul and God, and of unrest in the soul itself. Christ reconciles us to God by his cross, and brings our souls into harmony with the will of God. This is the only sure and solid peace.

Vers. 11—16.—"*Untempered mortar.*" The teaching of the false prophets of peace is here compared to a wall built of untempered mortar, which is overthrown in a tempest.

I. A FALSE HOPE IS LIKE A WALL BUILT WITH UNTEMPERED MORTAR. 1. *It offers protection.* The wall is built, and it endures long enough to invite the threatened people to take shelter behind it. It stands between them and the enemy. So a false hope is planted between men and their danger, like a city wall, and it encourages them to despise the danger. 2. *It presents a fair appearance.* The wall may be well designed with towers, and bastions, and battlements, and all the latest improvements in plans of fortifications. It has a certain mortar holding the stones together, which may appear to be of the very best quality. So false hopes charm with an appearance of solidity. 3. *It contains solid materials.* It is not a mere mound of earth. There are good hewn stones in the structure. Hence its deceptive appearance. A lie that is half a truth is the most deadly lie. We may have certain solid truths of the Christian religion. Yet if these are not united by personal faith they hang loosely together, and will not save us. 4. *It lacks an essential element.* The mortar is rotten. Then all the rest goes for nothing. "*One* thing thou lackest" (Mark x. 21). Yet that one thing may be so vital that the absence of it may lead to utter failure. Our system of religion, like the teaching of the false prophets, may have every commendable element, beauty, symmetry, fulness, etc., except one—*truth.* Then, alas! there is nothing to hold it together, and the whole is no better than a heap of rubbish.

II. THE TEMPEST OF TRIAL WILL SHATTER A FALSE HOPE. When we see people who are comfortably ensconced in a neat little system of religious conceptions, though we know that that system is only held together by the friable mortar of fancy, not by the Portland cement of truth, at first it might seem cruel to unsettle them. But it should be remembered that they are certain to be unsettled at length, and the only questions are as to when and how this will take place. If the rotten wall is not pulled down, some day it will be thrown down. 1. *The tempest of trial will come.* God sends his hailstorm, his hurricane. It came to Jerusalem in Nebuchadnezzar's invasion. It visits every soul at some time, for "man is born to trouble," etc. If our bark is only made for fair weather, it is doomed to shipwreck, because the storm will break at last on every life. If it does not come during our earthly course, it will visit us at the close. Death will then come as a howling tempest. 2. *The false hope will then crumble away.* Hail and hurricane dash down the feeble, pretentious wall. Trouble overthrows false hopes. We may be content to live in the dreamland of illusion during the drowsy summer days of prosperity. But trouble compels us to be real. Then we are forced to ask ourselves in solemn earnestness, "What is truth?" Then the refuge of lies tumbles into a hopeless ruin. 3. *The builder of the false hope will suffer in its overthrow.* "Ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof." False teachers will suffer with the overthrow of their teachings. They who take refuge in falsehood will be buried in the ruin of their delusions. The greater the hope, the more fearful will be its fall, and the more dreadfully will they be bruised and crushed who take up their abode in it. 4. *The false hope is overthrown that we may turn to the true Hope.* "Christ *our* Hope."

Vers. 17—20.—*Effeminate religion.* If Ezekiel is not to be read with prosaic literalness as referring to the women of Jerusalem, but is to be understood to describe, in scornful metaphor, the false prophets as daughters of Jerusalem sewing pillows, he has here given us a picture of effeminate religion.

I. THE RELIGION WHICH IGNORES STERN FACTS IS EFFEMINATE. 1. *There is a noble sphere for woman in religion.* The women of the Bible give us many a fine example of exalted piety. From Deborah, "the mother in Israel," to the Marys of the gospel story, women have appeared on the sacred page as inspiring examples. The Bible elevates the position of woman, and teaches us to treat her with reverence. 2. *There is something feminine in the highest character of men.* We see it in Jeremiah and St. John. Christ combines in his own Person the perfection of a woman's character with the perfection of a man's. 3. *Nevertheless, there is an effeminacy of religion.* "Effeminate," says Hengstenberg, "is all accommodation theology." The present inclination to shun the stern facts of revelation, and confine attention to what is pleasing, runs in the direction of effeminacy. If we adapt our religion to the inclinations of people, instead of declaring the whole counsel of God, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, we betray a sad lack of virile strength.

II. EFFEMINATE RELIGION AIMS ONLY AT EASE AND COMFORT. These "daughters of Jerusalem," the effeminate prophets, spent their time in sewing pillows when they should have been forging swords or building solid walls; for they were only whispering soft words of hollow consolation when they should have been renouncing sin and preparing to face calamity. 1. *There are pillows for evil consciences.* Men desire to escape from the stabs of conscience. They would lay the restless conscience at ease. An effeminate religion helps to do this by lulling the alarmed sense of guilt and danger. 2. *There are pillows for indolence.* When called to action effeminate souls prefer ease and comfort. We meet with consoling promises in Scripture, but not for such. It is the mistake of many that they convert the religion which should be a stimulant into an opiate.

III. EFFEMINATE RELIGION MUST BE DENOUNCED AND OPPOSED. 1. *It is cruel.* The prophets of Jerusalem were fattening themselves at the expense of their neighbours, and preserving their own lives by destroying the lives of other people (ver. 18). 2. *It is mercenary.* God is "polluted" for "handfuls of barley and pieces of bread." This "preaching to the times" in meek submission to the *zeitgeist* is a profitable thing for the popular preacher, but it means unfaithfulness to the Master when pleasant words only are spoken, and hard truths are hidden in order to bring "grist to the mill." 3. *It is fatal.* God says, "Behold, I am against your pillows." The present age has a horror of pain. But sin is worse than pain, and rough dealing which saves from sin is better than pillows of ease for impenitent souls. They who trust to artificial comfort now will be awakened by the terrible arm of judgment. The pillows are supposed to be made for God's arms, so that he may act softly. But no softened doctrine will destroy the stern facts of judgment.

Ver. 22.—*Misplaced sorrow.* We have here set before us the twofold mischief of the false preaching of peace. The righteous are made needlessly sad, and the wicked are spared the sorrows which they need to drive them from their evil ways, and are thus confirmed in their wickedness.

I. False ideas in religion bring needless sorrow to good people. One particular aspect of this mischief is here brought before us—that of the triumph of sin and the prospect of its immunity, together with the persecution of men who resist it. Such was the condition of things at Jerusalem under the influence of the popular prophets in the days of Jeremiah; and a similar state appears to have prevailed when Ezekiel was writing. But we may see other aspects of the same mischief. 1. *Doubt as to Divine justice.* If sin is to be unrestrained, goodness may fail. It looks then as though the world were left to drift without control. 2. *Doubt as to the Fatherly care of God.* This is an opposite mistake in appearance, and yet the two lie near together. They both come from losing the perception of God's active presence. In the second case, however, good people may trouble themselves by dwelling exclusively on the stern features of judgment, through a reaction against the laxity of popular notions. 3. *Misapplication of the doctrine of election.* Good people have feared they might not be among the elect. A false fatalism has hung like a pall over their hopes. They have not seen the freedom of grace, the perfect love of God for every soul, the open door for return. 4. *A horror of the unpardonable sin.* Yet they who fear they have committed this sin prove by their very distress that they have not, because that distress shows that they are not dead to spiritual things.

II. False ideas in religion keep away needful sorrow from bad people. Sorrow for sin is a wholesome experience, and nothing can be more dangerous than to be able to do evil without experiencing any feeling of compunction. The flattering theology which would encourage such a condition is the most deadly enemy to its dupes, and while it professes kindness to the sinners whom it lulls to sleep as they float down the rapids of increasing wickedness, it is really murdering their souls by rendering them deaf to the thunders of the cataract. Let us note some of the delusions which lead to this fatal result: 1. *Disbelief in judgment to come.* Soothed by such a notion, reckless men imagine that they can sin with impunity. It would be better for them if they were pained by visions of judgment. No doubt the extravagant, coarse pictures of a medieval hell have led to a revolt against the idea of future punishment. Yet whatever may be the nature of that punishment, justice requires some terrible retribution for terrible sin. 2. *The belief that God is only mild.* His love is infinite. But *therefore* it must include wrath against sin. Soft-hearted benevolence is not perfect love. 3. *Light views of sin.* The evil being slightly regarded, its punishment is not expected to be great. Moreover, apart from slavish fears of future suffering, sin itself should be sorrowed over as a hateful thing. But while it is painted in flattering hues it will not be followed by wholesome compunction.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*Pretended prophets.* There is no institution in itself so good but it may be corrupted and turned to evil purposes. Prophecy was given to the Hebrew people as a token of Jehovah's interest in them and care for them. The intention was to afford national guidance and consolation, to give to religion an intellectual character, and to counteract any tendency to formalism which a misunderstanding of the sacerdotal and sacrificial system would naturally encourage. Prophecy was especially adapted to those Israelites who were far from Jerusalem, the scene of sacrifices and of festivals; and the children of the Captivity were, in an especial manner, indebted to the prophets for the counsel, the inspiration, the encouragement, which they needed in their banishment from the land of their fathers. Amongst these exiles in the East there arose self-seeking, ambitious, hypocritical, and pretentious men, who assumed the prophetic office, ministered to the prejudices of their fellow-countrymen, and often led them astray by their erroneous advice. Against such men Ezekiel was commissioned to raise his protest, in language of severe denunciation and warning.

I. The profession and claims of the false prophets. The men here exposed were not prophets of any heathen deity, ministers of any idolatrous religion. They claimed to be servants of Jehovah, and to speak in his name to their fellow-countrymen. They prefaced their statements and their advice with such language as Ezekel here quotes: "Hear ye the word of the Lord;" "The Lord saith." Doubtless there were those who were conciliated and attracted by such claims, but who would have resented any summons addressed to them in the name of a heathen deity.

II. THE PRACTICAL CONTRADICTION OF THEIR PROFESSION AND CLAIMS. In terms figurative, yet impressive and conclusive, Ezekiel exhibits the hollowness of the pretences advanced by these lying leaders of the people. They are "like foxes in the waste places"—cunning, crafty creatures, who make their dwelling in the ruins and the wreck of a deserted city. So the prophets who profess to guide the people really prey upon them, and are most at home in the destruction and desolation which they have helped to effect. They have not taken their place in the breach, they have not helped in the defence of the city, they have not stood in the van of the battle, when the enemy has made an assault. Here is the practical test, which reveals the worthlessness of all professions of patriotism, of all claims to leadership.

III. THE REAL INSPIRATION OF THE FALSE PROPHETS. The secret is disclosed; the explanation of the illusion is given. The false prophets prophesy out of their own hearts; they follow their own spirit; they have seen nothing; the Lord hath not sent them; theirs is a lying divination; they have spoken vanity, and seen lies. In a word, professing to derive their commission and their message from the Eternal, the All-wise, they simply utter what commends itself to their own opinion, what serves their own interest, what agrees with their own sinful prejudices. This accounts for the unwisdom and worthlessness of their advice. They who follow them may expect to be misled.

IV. THE CONDEMNATION OF THE FALSE PROPHETS. "Woe unto the foolish prophets, saith the Lord God;" "I am against you." This condemnation is apparent from several facts. 1. Their predictions are falsified, and their counsels brought to nought. 2. They mislead the people to destruction. 3. They bring confusion upon themselves. This sentence is pronounced in language very plain and very smiting. The hypocritical pretenders to a Divine commission are excluded from the register of the house of Israel, and are denied entrance into the land of Israel. All their plotting and lies are not only unmasked; they issue in confusion and destruction to themselves.—T.

Vers. 10—16.—*The vanity of flattering counsel.* It has often been observed regarding the recorded discourses of the Lord Jesus, that his severest denunciations were directed against the hypocritical professors of religion, especially such as misled their fellowmen into error and sin. The same may be said of Ezekiel; his language, when exposing the hollow pretensions of the false and foolish prophets, who by their advice were leading the people into destruction, becomes almost invective. The particular offence of which these hypocrites were guilty was this—they encouraged the people, in opposition to the declarations of Jehovah by his prophets, to believe that the nation stood in no special danger; they professed to "see visions of peace" for Jerusalem; and they by this means hindered the people from repentance and reformation, in which alone lay the possibility of salvation. In Ezekiel's view these false prophets pretended to build up the edifice of national stability and prosperity upon unsound foundations and with untempered mortar; all defects were smeared with plaster and concealed from an ordinary observer. The prophet, however, foretold the approach of torrents of rain and hailstones, by which the worthlessness of this pretentious work should be revealed, and the work should be utterly destroyed.

I. AN INSECURE FOUNDATION AND STRUCTURE. Spiritual work is often compared to the labour of a builder. The wise and faithful teacher and counsellor lays a sound foundation, builds with strong and approved material, carries out a wise plan with patience and efficiency, and brings his work to a prosperous issue when the topstone is laid with rejoicing. Far otherwise is it with the worldly and crafty, who build for their own selfish purposes, who are careless as to the basis upon which they rear the edifice, as to the substance, and the workmanship. All they care for is the appearance presented by their work. When they labour professedly for the good of their fellow-men, they are like the builder who uses rotten stone and daubs it with untempered mortar. The structure is for a time imposing to the eye of the beholder; defects are hidden, and all looks well. Those who mislead the Lord's people are in the habit of saying, "Peace!"

when there is no peace. Their visions are illusive, and their prophecies are falsehoods.

II. Storm and rain. The plausible appearance is but for a season. Time tries all. There is ever a day of reckoning at hand. The prophet of the Lord reminds pretenders and hypocrites that an overflowing shower, great hailstones, and a stormy wind shall come. The anger and fury of the Lord will not always be restrained. It was so in the history of the Jewish people. Smooth things had been prophesied, but not with Divine authority. The peace was superficial and brief. The calamities which false counsellors had represented as imaginary proved to be an awful reality. What, then, became of the work which had been carried out with loud professions of authority, and which had appeared to the unobservant so fair and sound? The wall was broken down, the daubing disappeared, and they who daubed it were no more seen. "Who can abide the day of his coming?" In the hour of trial there is no security save in a Divine foundation, in workmanship wrought upon Divine principles and in accordance with Divine plans. The building which is of God shall stand. But the worthlessness of all beside shall be made manifest. What is not of God shall be swept away by the flood and tempest of inevitable judgment.

Application. 1. The solemnity and responsibility of the ministry to souls are impressively taught in the imagery of this passage. Let every man take heed what and how he builds. 2. The importance is made apparent of applying to wise and faithful counsellors. It is not the learned, the prudent, the pretentious, who must needs be right and trustworthy. Let every man try the spirits, whether they are taught of God.—T.

Vers. 17—23.—*False prophetesses.* Women have always played an important part in the religious history of every nation, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil. The Scriptures, with their proverbial impartiality, record instances of both kinds—of women who rendered signal service to their people by their fidelity to God, and of women who used their influence to corrupt and to mislead those over whom their power extended. Of the prophetesses whose pretensions are exposed in this passage we know nothing from other sources of information. But if curiosity is unsatisfied, enough is here revealed to justify us in thinking of these women as a very pernicious element in the Hebrew nation at the era of the Captivity.

I. Their seductive and imposing arts. It is not important for us to understand all the allusions in this passage. Whatever were these pillows and kerchiefs, it seems clear that they were used in connection with superstitious divinations, and were intended to impress all beholders with a sense of the dignity and mysterious powers of these sorceresses. The mystic veil that robed the tall form of the prophetesses, the paraphernalia with which such persons were wont to invest themselves, tended to inspire reverence and awe, as if for a supernatural power revealed in the stately presence and authoritative voice.

II. Their mercenary ends. There is something picturesque and striking in the description given by the prophet of the poor, deluded victims who resorted to the sorceresses, carrying with them "handfuls of barley and pieces of bread"—the common tribute paid in such cases and to such persons. Probably the women loved to exercise power and to exact respect; yet with most of them the motive was mercenary, and they were content to deceive others if they could enrich, or even support, themselves.

III. Their prophecies. The term could only have been applied to their utterances in irony. For it is evident (1) that their inspiration came from their own heart, and (2) that the substance of their so-called prophecies was false. They were animated by a desire to please those who resorted to them; and this they did to gratify their own prejudices or to display their own worldly wisdom. In such communications there was nothing that deserved the name of prophecy; for a prophet is one who speaks in the place of God, and who shows no regard to the person or to the wishes of those addressed. It was no spirit of rivalry or of jealousy which induced the Prophet Ezekiel to speak thus severely of these female impostors; it was for the public good that their deceptions should be exposed.

IV. Their perversion of righteousness. They are said to have hunted the souls of the Lord's people; and this they did by their perverse and unjust oracles. The language used concerning them is very remarkable, and it could not have been used through mere delight in antithesis. It is said that the ministry of the "prophetesses" was "to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live." They were reproached with their attempt to subvert God's righteous providence: "With lies ye have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way." A more scathing denunciation could not have been uttered than this; these women strove to overturn the moral order, to encourage the rebellious, and to depress the just and godly!

V. THEIR UNMASKING AND EXPOSURE. The God of truth and rectitude declared himself opposed to these seducers of his people. The symbols of their delusive arts should be stripped from them. Their hypocrisy should be unveiled, and their pretences should be ridiculed. The means by which they had been wont to ensnare men should be taken from them. Their reputation and their power should be destroyed, and their influence should come to an end.

VI. THE DELIVERANCE OF THEIR VICTIMS. Those whom the false prophetesses sought to entangle and to capture were the Lord's people; and the Lord claimed his own. It was his purpose to deliver them out of the hand of their spiritual foe, and to let the hunted souls go free. The means by which this result was to be brought about are not stated; but the resources of the Omnipotent were sufficient to ransom and liberate his own. Thus it should be made apparent to all observers that the Lord reigneth, and that he is ever mindful of his own.—T.

Vers. 1—9.—*The perils of falseness.* The work of God's prophets is made more difficult by the competition of pretenders. They cater for popularity by predicting only what is pleasing to flesh and blood. Hence they bring discredit on all God's revelations. In Ezekiel's day the false teachers were specially busy in Jerusalem, confronting and counteracting Jeremiah; and the sad effect of false hopes was felt at Chebar as well as in Judæa.

I. CARNAL AMBITION IS OFTEN THE PARENT OF FALSEHOOD. The prophecies and counsels of Jeremiah ran counter to all the prejudices and predilections of the people. Their fleshly nature rose in arms against such possible disaster. Heedless of God and God's plans, they would create for themselves a better fortune. The worldly wise among them, gifted with superior speech, resolved to outrival God's prophets—to become candidates for popularity—to aspire after political power. Amidst a nation's disaster and weakness there is always opportunity for the crafty to gain some sinister end. They countenanced any intrigue that promised temporary advantage. Under pretence of patriotic zeal, they sought mainly, if not wholly, a personal elevation.

II. CARNAL AMBITION LEADS TO SELF-ASSUMPTION. It is very likely that, at the outset, these false prophets deceived themselves. They imagined that they saw a way out of the catastrophe, and urged the rulers, against Jeremiah's advice, to pursue that way. If it was pleaded that God had ordered otherwise, these men set up a counter-authority. Stung by the suggestion that their counsel was not equal in value to that of Jeremiah, they boldly claimed to be the messengers of God. In their fanatic zeal they deemed their sagacious plans to have been given them from heaven. They were too much bent on gaining their end to inquire carefully into this matter. Where was the proof that Jeremiah or Ezekiel was more favoured to receive Divine intelligence than they? The end would justify the means! Heedless of consequences, they would publicly claim to speak as the ambassadors of God.

III. SELF-ASSUMPTION EMPLOYS SOPHISTICAL ARTS OF SPEECH. They are described as foxes—notorious for cunning—yea, cunning as hungry foxes in the desert. All their wits were exercised to weave the most plausible web of argument. Every possible circumstance favourable to their designs was seized upon, and made to prop their nefarious policy, until what they had induced others to believe, they believed also themselves. They ensnared themselves in their own nets. From knaves they gradually became fanatics. Careless about the exact truth at the beginning, they lost at length the power to discern between truth and falsehood.

IV. SELF-ASSUMPTION IS DEAD TO THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS. In the fifth verse the prophet accuses them thus: "Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the hedge for the house of Israel to stand in the battle." They used others, as the monkey did the cat's paw. Where arduous toil, and especially where serious danger, appeared, they were conspicuous by their absence. Truth makes men at all times courageous, but falsehood corrodes the metal of a man's bravery. These pretentious prophets desired the honour and the advantage; the risks they devolved on others. Honest men were made the ladder by which they sought to climb.

V. SELF-ASSUMPTION IS SURE TO COLLAPSE. Vaulting ambition overleaps itself. The frog that would swell its dimensions to the size of a bull destroyed itself. 1. *False teachers make God their direct enemy.* "I am against you, saith the Lord God." The God of truth hates hypocrisy. All falseness shall be like empty thistle-down, which the wind scatters. 2. *They shall be excluded from the circle of honour.* They had assumed to be heads and leaders in the councils of the nation; they shall be dishonoured, and cast out of the deliberative assembly. The false shall be, sooner or later, excommunicated—blackballed. 3. *Their posterity shall become extinct.* There shall be none to perpetuate their name. New honour often comes to the memory of a righteous man from children of renown. Such honour and satisfaction shall be denied to them. They shall perish root and branch. 4. *They shall not participate in the coming restoration.* "Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel." The distinctive possession which God gives shall be for the true Israel, "even for those who have no guile." In the time of Israel's real prosperity there "shall not come into them the uncircumcised or the unclean." He is a Jew who is one inwardly.—D.

Vers. 10—16.—*The foolish builders—a parable.* In order to make the lesson more impressive and more abiding, it is repeated in the form of a parable. Our generous God takes immense pains to engrave his truth on human hearts.

I. NATIONAL POLITY IS ANALOGOUS TO A BUILDING. As the human body requires some sort of material dwelling to protect it from external evils, so society requires some system of national administration that shall protect it against external foes. *That* administration, to be successful, must be a combination of wisdom and strength—an edifice both moral and material. If a nation cannot withstand all invaders by means of its armies and its fortresses, it must maintain itself by means of mutual treaty and mutual concord. Some defence it must have.

II. THIS BUILDING WAS FRAMED WITH SLENDER AND SUPERFICIAL MATERIALS. The weakness and rottenness of the walls were concealed with untempered plaster and with mere whitewash. An unsound and leaky ship is made no more seaworthy by painting her in gay colours. Plausible words do not make a sound policy, neither does good raiment make an honest man. Solid foundations and sound materials are essential to make a wall safe or a national policy prosperous.

III. THERE WAS AN EVIL CONSPIRACY. "One built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar." Evil men will do, in combination with each other, deeds they would not venture on alone. Union is strength, even in wickedness. The base policy would commend itself all the more to popular acceptance if it had the support (apparently independent) of several advocates. It is a crime to lend ourselves to an enterprise merely because it has the sanction of numbers. The quality of its supporters must be pondered.

IV. TESTING EVENTS WERE AT HAND. Every wall or building is designed to resist wind and rain. If it cannot do *this*, its purpose is vain. If it succumbs to storm, it is worse than useless; it adds to the peril. It is safer to be in the open field during a storm than to be within a rickety house. The very provision made for security, if it be ill founded and ill constructed, becomes a new danger. The Jews were aware that extraordinary danger was imminent, and therefore ought to have been the more careful in their sound defence of the state. Recklessness is only sham courage, and is the foe of wisdom.

V. OVERTHROW WAS CERTAIN. If God be against our plans, success is impossible. No human undertaking can resist Omnipotence. The destruction was foretold, but the warning only excited ridicule. It was not simply that the cunning policy of these men should be overthrown—*that* would be a small evil; but the overthrow would be destruction to their persons and destruction to the kingdom. They were involving a nation in disaster. We know not where the mischief of evil deeds will end.

VI. Great reproach will ensue. "Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" The surrounding nations were eagerly watching how *this* nation, which boasted of Jehovah as their God, would deport itself. If it was seen that the princes and captains were bolstering up the kingdom with craft and intrigue and falsehood, they would despise their professed faith—yea, despise their God. The names of these foolish builders would be bandied about as a byword and a reproach. Their ill fame would follow them through many generations. Perpetual discredit and reprobation are a part of God's punishment.—D.

Vers. 17—23.—*Effeminate religion.* Moral evil is sadly contagious. The boastful, arrogant temper of the false prophets spread to the women also. It was a time of great excitement—a national crisis, in which all political considerations were intermingled with religion. Amid the general panic of fear, women as well as men were stirred to action. The party who sought God and desired to know his will were a small minority. The major part of the people, both men and women, were carried away by a spirit of carnal wisdom. They cared far more to secure personal advantage than to please God. But the gravamen of their offence was that they falsely assumed to speak in the stead of God.

I. Self-made religion is vain. In every age men have ventured to invent for themselves religious creeds and forms. The human mind has chafed against God's requirements as being irksome and severe, and the world has carved out a religion that shall be self-pleasing, a lullaby to conscience, a sedative to fear. The doctrines and creeds have been spun out of men's self-consciousness, and have had no foundation outside themselves. In the pride of their heart they have imagined that Reason was a god, and that this internal god was supreme. They see vanity and prophesy falsehood.

II. This self-made religion is luxurious. All its beliefs and practices are regulated by pleasure. What ministers to present enjoyment is tolerated; what is unpleasant is denounced. "They sew pillows to all arm-holes." Bodily ease is paramount. To crucify the flesh is a heresy. To wear a jewelled cross upon the breast is an ornament, and is therefore approved; but to obey commands which are a burden to the flesh, to bear Christ's cross of pain and reproach, *this* is contemned. He who really desires acceptance with God may well suspect any religion that panders to bodily pleasure. "He who is a friend of the world is an enemy of God."

III. Self-made religion seeks earthly advantage. "Will ye pollute me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread?" These self-styled servants of God really cared nothing for the honour of God. They did not scruple to profane his Name, and to trample on sacred things, if only they could gain a pittance of bread thereby. They made merchandise of religion. It was a religion for the body, not for the soul. They acted as if *gain* were godliness. So is it ofttimes now. If religion would ensure prosperity to secular business, many men would profess to be religious. But if religion frowns upon fraud and deceit, they will eschew it as unfriendly to their worldly prospects. Yet, in the long run, godliness is favourable to every human interest. "It is profitable for all things."

IV. Self-made religion is hostile to righteousness. These false prophets sought "to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live." It seeks to frustrate all God's purposes, to overturn the very foundations of righteousness. God's plan of government is to make righteousness contribute to life. "The just shall live by faith;" "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But this self-made religion of proud men strives to arrest the processes of God's rule, and endeavours to make the worst things appear the best. "It puts darkness for light, and light for darkness." It would fain slay the righteous; for the godly are as thorns in the sides of the hypocrite. It seeks to confuse men's ideas of truth and error, of right and wrong.

V. This self-made religion is injurious both to the wicked and to the righteous. "Ye have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way." It is God's wise intention that, in proportion as men are righteous they should have joy. This is their encouragement and, in part, their reward. He who seeks to prevent this is fighting against God. But it is a greater wrong still to encourage the wicked in their evil ways. The pains and disappointments which the wicked experience are the thorns with which God would hedge up their way and turn them back. He who promises heaven to sinners is a confederate in their sin, and shall share their punishment. Such a one is a soul-murderer. On his skirts is indelibly fixed the blood of human souls. To encourage false hopes is treason against humanity.

VI. SELF-MADE RELIGION SHALL SUFFER A COLLAPSE. Sooner or later the bubble will burst, for it has no foundation in truth or in reality. It is a mirage of men's heated imagination, and cannot long endure. The God of truth will, in his own time, appear; will scatter to the winds the flimsy fancies of men; and the mischief they have sought to do to others shall return in tenfold disaster upon their own heads. If men will not know and acknowledge God in the day of his kindness, they shall recognize him in the night-time of his vengeance. Falsehood cannot perpetuate itself. Like Jonah's gourd, it springs up in a night, and in a night it perishes. But the truth, like its Author, is omnipotent, and must prevail.

"Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers.
But Error, wounded, writhes with pain,
And dies amid her worshippers."

D.

Vers. 1—16.—*The sin and punishment of false prophets.* "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel," etc. This subject has already been introduced in ch. xii. 24. In that verse we have as it were the text, and in this chapter the sermon. It has been suggested that this chapter should be read in conjunction with Jer. xxiii. 9—40. "The identity of phrases and ideas forces upon us the conclusion that the author of the one must have had the other before him. We know that Jeremiah's writings were forwarded to the Jews in Chaldea (Jer. xxix.), and there is therefore no reason to doubt that Ezekiel took up a well-known prophecy to enforce and apply it to his companions in exile. They probably had read Jeremiah's words as applying to others than themselves. Ezekiel now would teach them that it is not at Jerusalem alone that false prophets are to be discovered and reproved. The present chapter, therefore, must be taken as addressed to *the Jews in exile*, which agrees with the whole tenor; see for instance ver. 9" ('Speaker's Commentary'). Two principal lines of thought are followed by the prophet, viz. the sin of the false prophets, and the judgment of God upon them because of their sin. And these lines of thought are not kept separate from each other, but they interlace each other. We will notice each apart.

I. THE SIN OF THE FALSE PROPHETS. Certain prominent features of their sin are brought into view. 1. *Their prophecies were self-originated.* They prophesied "out of their own heart" (ver. 2); they "followed their own spirit, and had seen nothing" (ver. 3). In the case of the true prophet, a communication was received by him from God which he communicated to the people, or a vision was unfolded to him which he afterwards made known to them. There was an objective reality of that which he was conscious of within himself; his consciousness of the things which he published arose from their verity impressed upon him by the Spirit of God; his consciousness as a prophet was a consequence of Divine influence. But the things proclaimed by the false prophets had no existence except in their own mind and heart; they were entirely subjective, having no objective truth answering to them. And they were not sent of God (ver. 6); they had not received any commission from him; yet they presumed to speak in his Name, and to impose upon the people their own imaginations as communications received from him. 2. *Their prophecies were untrue.* "They have seen vanity and lying divination, that say, The Lord saith; and the Lord hath not sent them," etc. (vers. 6, 7). "Thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have spoken vanity, and seen lies," etc. An example is given of their lying prophecies: "They have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there is no peace," etc. They encouraged the Jews in Jerusalem to believe that they had nothing to fear from the Chaldean powers (cf. Jer. xiv. 13; xxviii. 1—4). And when the people endeavoured to strengthen themselves by the coalition with Egypt, they encouraged them in that course; for as we understand it, that is the meaning of the prophetic figure: "When one buildeth up a wall, behold, they daub it with untempered mortar." The figure itself is thus explained by Dr. Kitto: "It is a wall made of beaten earth rammed into moulds or boxes, to give the parts the requisite shape and consistence, and so deposited, by the withdrawal of the mould, layer by layer, upon the wall, each layer drying in its place as the work proceeds. The blocks are usually of considerable size, and are of various quality and strength, as well as cost, according to the materials employed, and the time expended upon them. The simplest are merely of earth, or of earth compacted with straw. This is the kind which the prophet had in view, and which is used in Devon and in Morocco, as well as in the East. It cannot stand against heavy rains; and therefore, unless the climate be very dry, it requires to be faced or coated with a *tempered mortar* of lime or sand, as a fence against the weather. Without this the body of the wall is liable to the contingencies described by the prophet" ('Daily Bible Illustrations'). The people built their slight and flimsy wall of political alliance against the Chaldeans, and the false prophets coated it with their *un*tempered mortar of vain assurances of safety; and the people believed them to their own dread discomfiture. 3. *They claimed Divine authority for their lying prophecies.* They said, "The Lord saith," although he had not spoken unto them. Great was their presumption and impious daring in making this high claim. "They counterfeit," as M. Henry says, "the broad seal of heaven, than which they cannot do a greater indignity to mankind, for hereby they put a reproach upon Divine revelation, lessen its credit, and weaken its credibility. When these pretenders are found to be deceivers, atheists and infidels will thence infer, They are all so." 4. *Their influence was destructive.* It was so in two ways. (1) Negatively. They made no attempt to save the people from the ruin which was coming upon them. "Ye have not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the fence for the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." When a city is besieged and a breach is made in its walls, the leaders of the defence take prompt measures for stopping the breach. The Lord had come against his people as a besieger by reason of their sins, but these false prophets, who aspired to be leaders of the people, made no effort to save them (cf. ch. xxii. 30). They did not call for that repentance and reformation which might have averted the approaching ruin, as it did in the case of Nineveh (Jonah iii. 5—10). They did not call upon God in prayer to spare the sinful people, as Moses did on several occasions (Exod. xxxii. 11—14, 31—34; Numb. xiv. 13—24; Ps. cvi. 23). False prophets are not likely to be famous intercessors. (2) Positively. They actively promoted the ruin of the people by assuring them of peace and safety when there was no peace, and peril was imminent and sure. They were "like foxes in the waste places" for destructiveness. Nowhere in the sacred Scriptures are foxes mentioned because of their cunning, but because of their injuriousness (cf. Song of Sol. ii. 15). "The foxes here correspond to the ravening wolves in Matt. vii. 15, and the grievous wolves in Acts xx. 29, representing false teachers." Terrible is the injury which is wrought by corrupt religious teachers (cf. Isa. ix. 16; Jer. xii. 10; l. 6; Acts xx. 29; 2 Pet. ii. 1—3).

II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON THE FALSE PROPHETS. This judgment is expressed generally in ver. 8, and in a way that should have awakened serious concern. "Behold, I am against you, saith the Lord God." When God is against any one, nothing can be really well with him. "If God is for us, who is against us?" If God is against us, who is for us in any true sense? But the judgment is set forth with something of detail in vers. 9—16. It has two chief features. 1. *Their exclusion from the community of Israel.* (Ver. 9.) They had sought prominence and distinction among the people, and had attained their object; but a complete reversal of their position awaited them. They should not have won a place among the chosen people; their names should be erased or omitted from the authorized register of the Israelites; and when the exiles returned unto their own land, they should not return with them. As Fairbairn says, "Inheriting the curse of the covenant, 'they should be cut off from among their people.'" There is, perhaps, in this a hint of a darker doom, even the omission of their names from a much more important register (Luke x. 20; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. xxi. 27), and their non-recognition by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. vii

22, 23). **2.** *The total overthrow and ruin of both themselves and their work.* (Vers. 11—16.) Their work was to be swept away by overwhelming forces. The stormy wind, the overflowing shower, and the great hailstones represent the Chaldean army. That army would make an utter end of the vain hopes which the false prophets had originated and fostered. No work can be stable which is begun and carried on against the will of God. Every wall which is built in defiance of his laws will soon fall into ruin. And in the case before us the presumptuous and foolish builders were ruined with their work. "It shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof." The wall of delusive hopes, which they had daubed with untempered mortar, would be thrown down, and Jerusalem would be destroyed, and in its fall the false prophets would be ruined. "Thus will I accomplish my fury upon the wall, and upon them that have daubed it with untempered mortar," etc. (vers. 15, 16).

APPLICATION. Here is solemn warning against false prophets and teachers, who are not confined to any one age or people. When God is represented as love without righteousness, or mercy without judgment; when men are assured of salvation without repentance for sin or renewal of heart; when peace is proclaimed to men who are living in sin,—then the spirit of the false prophets of Ezekiel's age is reproduced. We are warned in the New Testament of the rise of false Christs and of many false prophets (Matt. xxiv. 11; Mark xiii. 22), of "false apostles, deceitful workers" (2 Cor. xi. 13), of some who "would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. i. 7), and of "false teachers who shall bring in destructive heresies" (2 Pet. ii. 1). Wherefore let Christians take heed what they hear and read and receive. Happily, the test by which to prove religious teaching is not abstruse or difficult. Does it agree with "that which is inscribed in the writing of truth?" Does the teaching of man harmonize with the eternal law of God? Does it "make for righteousness"? "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or" whether the teachers "prophesy out of their own heart." Vigorous physical health is one of the most effective safeguards against the diseases which assail the body. And when the heart is susceptible to Divine influence, and the conscience loyally responds to the will of God, and the life is governed by that holy will, the man is not in much danger of being misled by erroneous teaching.—W. J.

Ver. 5.—*The breaches of sin, and the duty of closing them.* "Ye have not gone up into the gaps," etc. Our text suggests the following observations.

I. THE PRACTICE OF SIN EXPOSES MEN TO THE GREATEST DANGERS. The text suggests the figure of a besieged city, in the walls of which breaches have been made, through which the enemy rushes in to fight with its inhabitants and to take possession of its treasures. There is perhaps a reference to the approaching siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, in which that city would fall because of the sins of its inhabitants. So sin makes wide gaps in the defences of a people, deprives them of the Divine protection, and exposes them to the assaults of their enemies. The sins of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah made the wide breaches which let in the fiery flood which consumed them. The sins of the Israelites in the wilderness on one occasion made a gap in their defences through which the plague entered and slew fourteen thousand and seven hundred persons (Numb. xvi. 41—50). The sin of Achan in coveting, stealing, and concealing some of the spoils of Jericho, in defiance of express commands, opened a wide breach through which the enemies of Israel rushed, and put them to ignominious flight, and slew six and thirty of them (Josh. vii.). And when David sinned in numbering the people he made a gap through which the pestilence entered and destroyed seventy thousand men (2 Sam. xxiv.; cf. Isa. xlii. 24, 25).

II. THE CONTINUED PRACTICE OF SIN LEADS ON TO A CRISIS IN WHICH JUDGMENT WILL BE EXECUTED UPON SINNERS. That crisis is here called "the day of the Lord." "The day of Jehovah," says Schröder, "is the time fixed by him with reference to the reckoning to be given in to him." It seems to us more correct to say that it is "the time of the arrival of the judgment." This crisis was rapidly drawing near to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. If sinners persist in making the gaps, it is certain that their punishment will enter thereat and seize upon them. Sinful character and conduct advance towards maturity, and when that is attained, if not before, the sinner, or the community of sinners, will meet with just retribution. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The forbearance and long-suffering of God with the wicked are very great; but if these be trifled with and presumed upon, he will cease to exercise them, and will appear for the execution of his judgment (cf. Rom. ii. 4—11).

III. It is the duty of the faithful servants of God to endeavour to guard the imperilled people against the dangers which threaten them. When the people by their sins have exposed themselves to their enemies, it behoves the faithful to go up into the gaps, and to make "up the fence for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." This may be done: 1. *By preaching repentance to the guilty people.* When the people of Nineveh repented, the destruction of their city, which had been threatened because of their sins, was averted. If the prophets had summoned the people to repentance, and the people had responded truly to that summons, then would the breach in the fence have been made up, and they would have been able "to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." "There is no better wall than reformation of life." "If they have stood in my council, then had they caused my people to hear my words," etc. (Jer. xxiii. 22). 2. *By presenting intercession for the guilty people.* There are a number of impressive examples in the sacred Scriptures of the servants of God stepping into the gap and saving the imperilled people by their prayers (cf. Exod. xxxii. 11—14, 31—34; Ps. cvi. 23; Numb. xiv. 13—24; xvi. 41—48; 1 Sam. vii. 8—10). God has often graciously heard the cry of his faithful servants on behalf of the guilty, and turned aside from them the stroke of his judgment. He has spared the wicked for the sake of the righteous.

IV. False prophets and unworthy leaders in the Church of God altogether fail in this important duty. These false prophets had "not gone up into the gaps, neither made up the fence for the house of Israel to stand in the battle in the day of the Lord." They had neither preached repentance to the people, nor pleaded with God on their behalf; but had positively encouraged them in their sinful and false security; therefore the judgment of the Lord fell upon them to their utter overthrow. "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the fence, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none," etc. (cf. ch. xxii. 30, 31). "False prophets cannot pray." They have neither "interest in heaven nor intercourse with heaven." And they have no heart to make a stand against the sins of their people, and so save them from ruin.

Conclusion. 1. *How great a curse to a community are corrupt religious teachers and leaders!* They lure the people to ruin, while they assure them that all is well. 2. *How great a blessing to a community is the presence of godly and praying persons!* They are "the salt of the earth;" they are saviours of society.—W. J.

Vers. 10—12.—*False hopes encouraged and destroyed.* "Because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace," etc. We have in our text—

I. False prophets proclaiming a delusive salvation. The false prophets of Israel assured the people that by reason of their alliance with Egypt they were quite safe against Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon, and should soon be utterly independent of his control. Thus "they seduced the people, saying, Peace; and there was no peace" (cf. Jer. vi. 14; xxiii. 16, 17; xxvii. 14—16; xxviii. 1—4, 15; xxix. 8, 9). The conduct of these ancient prophets has its analogue in spiritual relations. When religious teachers proclaim their own fancies or speculations as Divine revelations; when they present the traditions and creeds of men as the saving truth of God; when they lead men to expect salvation apart from sincere repentance for sin, and hearty faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and loyal obedience to his will,—then are they false prophets, "saying, Peace; and there is no peace."

II. Sinful and misguided people trusting in a delusive salvation. The Jews believed their false prophets, and strengthened their alliance with Egypt, and cherished their vain hope of safety, independence, and prosperity; and the false prophets encouraged them in this course. The misguided people built up a slight wall, and the misleading prophets daubed it with untempered mortar. And in spiritual things men are building walls for their personal salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Some build the wall of *external morality.* They are diligent in the cultivation of correct and virtuous conduct, without any vitalizing and inspiring faith and love. Their gospel is one of good works and of fancied personal merit. A delusive confidence is theirs. Others build the wall of *theological orthodoxy.* They hold what they regard as a sound creed, and in some cases are zealous in maintaining it against everything and every one that appears opposed to it, and because of this they consider that their salvation is sure. But their assurance is vain. Others build the wall of *Church-membership*, deeming their eternal interests secure because they are members of a Christian Church. But their names may be enrolled in the register of a true Church on earth, but have no place "in the Lamb's book of life." And others build the wall of *religious observances.* They have been duly baptized and confirmed, they partake of the communion of the body and blood of our Saviour, and are exemplary in their attendance at public worship, and therefore they conclude that their salvation is assured. Perilous, and if persisted in fatal, is their delusion. Flimsy walls are these, each and all of them. Yet there are not wanting religious teachers to encourage builders such as these, and to daub their slight walls with untempered mortar.

III. False hopes of salvation swept away by the great God. "Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall," etc. (ver. 11). 1. *A period is approaching when the works and hopes of men will be severely tested.* "There shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it." Our Lord spake in a very similar strain of his hearers, and how they and their works would be tried. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them," etc. (Matt. vii. 24—27). And St. Paul wrote, "The fire shall prove each man's work of what sort it is." The testing-time sometimes occurs in this life. Change of circumstances, temptation, affliction, the near approach of death, each of these sometimes proves a crucial test of the character and the hopes of men. And after death "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." 2. *In the great testing-time no works and hopes shall abide but those which accord with the will of God.* The slight wall of these foolish builders, daubed with untempered mortar by these false prophets, would be rent and destroyed by the storms of God. The Chaldean army would soon shatter the unsubstantial fabric of their vain hopes, and destroy both them and their city. And in the spiritual testing every faith which does not work through love, and cleanse the heart and life, will prove a fatal delusion. Every character which is not founded upon Christ, and fashioned after his, will be found ruinously defective (cf. Isa. xxviii. 16, 17; 1 Cor. iii. 11).

IV. The utter failure of the vain hopes which they encouraged will cover the false prophets with reproach and shame. "Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you, Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?" The detection of false prophets is certain, and will certainly be followed by bitter derision. "What cause," says Greenhill, "had these prophets to blush, when God brought Nebuchadnezzar to besiege the city, when the walls were broken down, and they discovered to be false prophets, and their foundation, with which they upheld the hope of this people, to be lies, flatteries, and false divinations!" Unspeakably terrible will be the retribution of those who, professing to make known the will of God, have misled others in respect to the things which make for their eternal peace. The bitter reproaches of those whom they have ruinously deceived, and the just punishment adjudged them by the holy Lord God, will be a doom of intolerable anguish.

Conclusion. 1. *Let religious teachers regard it as of supreme importance that their teaching be in harmony with the will of God.* 2. *Let every one earnestly inquire upon what foundation, with what materials, and in what manner, he is building his personal character and his religious hopes.*—W. J.

Vers. 17—23.—*False prophetesses, their characteristics and condemnation.* "Likewise, thou son of man, set thy face against the daughters of thy people," etc. God sometimes raised up and inspired women to be prophetesses to his people. Miriam (Exod. xv. 20), Deborah (Judg. iv. 4), Hannah (1 Sam. ii. 1—10), and Huldah (2 Kings xxii. 14—20) were genuine prophetesses of the Lord in the times of the Old Testament. And in the time of Ezekiel there were false prophetesses—women who pretended to possess Divine inspiration, and to speak with Divine authority, but who "prophesied out of their own heart," and grievously misled the people. Greenhill suggests that they probably exceeded the false prophets in doing mischief; "for women, by reason of the tenderness of their nature, sweetness of their voices, respect amongst men, have the advantage to insinuate their opinions, and persuade more powerfully, especially when they have a repute for holiness, and are esteemed prophetical, as these were." There are difficulties in the interpretation of this paragraph; but, happily, the permanent moral instruction which it conveys is not obscure. It sets before us—

I. THE ACCOMMODATING AND FLATTERING CHARACTER OF FALSE PROPHECY. The pretended prophetesses are spoken of as "the women that sew pillows upon all elbows, and make kerchiefs for the head of persons of every stature." The precise meaning of these pillows and kerchiefs is very uncertain; but it seems to us that they should be interpreted figuratively. The aim of these false prophetesses was to make the people feel secure and at ease. They represented the state of national affairs as safe, comfortable, and full of promise. They thus ministered to a delusive repose and pleasure. They, in this respect, resembled the prophets who said, "Peace, when there was no peace," and who daubed the flimsy wall of false hopes with the untempered mortar of deceptive assurances. As M. Henry expresses it, "They did all they could to make people secure, which is signified by laying them easy, and to make people proud, which is signified by dressing them fine with handkerchiefs." False prophets, preachers, and teachers whom God hath not sent make it their object to say what will please the people and bring popularity to themselves.

II. THE PERNICIOUS POWER OF FALSE PROPHECY. 1. *It is blasphemous towards God.* "Ye have profaned me among my people." They blasphemed the sacred Name by employing it to authorize their false and evil communications. Moreover, as Hengstenberg remarks, "They profane God among the people, inasmuch as they assign him a friendly position towards sin." 2. *It is ruinous to man.* The false prophetesses are charged with hunting the souls of the Lord's people, slaying the souls that should not die, and strengthening "the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive." They encouraged sinners in their sins by assuring them that they were secure. The propagation of religious error is destructive of the health and life of souls. Such errors act as deadly poisons upon the moral life of those who receive them.

III. THE SELFISH MOTIVE OF FALSE PROPHECY. "Ye have profaned me among my people for handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread." They prophesied for their own profit, not for the good of the people. "There is nothing so sacred," says M. Henry, "which men of mercenary spirits, in whom the love of this world reigns, will not profane and prostitute, if they can but get money by the bargain. But they did it for poor gain; if they could get no more for it, rather than break they would sell you a false prophecy that should please you to a nicety for a beggar's dole, a piece of bread or a handful of barley; and yet that was more than it was worth." False and corrupt teachers are never actuated in their work by zeal for the glory of God or the good of men. They seek their own popularity or power, their temporal enrichment or comfort. Our Lord said, "I seek not mine own glory." And the true Christian minister can say, with St. Paul, "I seek not yours, but you."

IV. THE READY ACCEPTANCE OF FALSE PROPHECY. "Your lying to my people that hearken unto lies." Isaiah speaks of people who say to the prophets, "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." And there are people still who would rather hear pleasing fallacies than unpleasant truths; who wish to be soothed and comforted rather than summoned to repentance and conversion. What madness is theirs! "Is it wise in the man who has nearly ruined his constitution by intemperance, to ask the physician to tell him that he is in good health, and is carrying on a harmless course of indulgence? Is it wise in the man who is wasting his property by neglect or extravagance, to persuade his friends to hush their reproving voice, and flatter him that his prosperity is secure? Would the deceit in the former case change the condition of the patient? or the falsehood in the latter repair the fortunes of the spendthrift? How much greater is the folly of the sinner, who, instead of turning from sin to God, through faith in Christ, and thus getting rid of his alarms by abandoning his course of sin, refuses to change his conduct, and asks for a false representation of his condition! He is walking to the edge of a precipice, and solicits those who see his danger to tell him that he is safe" (James).

V. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD AGAINST THE AUTHORS OF FALSE PROPHECY. 1. *He will strip them of their seductions.* "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against your pillows," etc. (vers. 20, 21). When the Chaldeans took Jerusalem, slew its inhabitants, or seized and carried them into captivity, the seductions of these false prophetesses were completely destroyed. They would "no more see vanity, nor divine divinations." They would be put to utter silence and clothed with guilty shame. Teachers of error must sooner or later be confounded; for in its conflict with truth falsehood must ultimately be completely vanquished. 2. *He will defeat their designs.* "I will let the souls go, even the souls that ye hunt to make them fly [or, 'as birds']; . . . and deliver my people out of your hand, and they shall be no more in your hand to be hunted." The dark designs of the false prophetesses would be frustrated by God, and they themselves would be involved in the dire miseries that were coming upon the people of Jerusalem. Every one who cherishes purposes and is engaged in enterprises which are opposed to the holy will of God is advancing to total and terrible disappointment. 3. *He will convince them of his own Being and supremacy.* "Ye shall know that I am the Lord" (see our notes on these words in ch. vi. 7, 10; xi. 10).—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ver. 1.—As the result, probably, of the previous utterances, certain elders of Israel, *i.e.* of the exiles in Tel-Abib, came to consult Ezekiel, wishing to know what counsels or what predictions he had for them. In ch. viii. 1 we have "the elders of Judah," and it is possible that there were two groups in the population of the town, and that these represented Israel as distinct from Judah—a deputation, as it were, from the earlier exiles. The term appears again in ch. xx. 1. More probably, however, the terms are used interchangeably.

Ver. 3.—These men, etc. The prophet, taught by the word of the Lord, reads the hearts of those who came to him. The words do not imply, rather they exclude, the open practice of idolatry. The sin of the inquirers was that they had set up idols (*gillulim*, Ezekiel's favourite word; see note on ch. vi. 4) in their hearts. The LXX. gives διανοήματα, "thoughts of their hearts," as if to express this. They were hankering after the old false worships in which they had once taken part. The stumbling-block (see ch. iii. 20) of their iniquity was set up there. That divided heart, the "double mind" of Jas. i. 8, made true inquiry, as it made true prayer for guidance, impossible. **Shall I be inquired of at all, etc.?** The "at all" represents the emphatic iteration of the verb in the Hebrew. The Vulgate, *Numquid interrogatus respondebo eis?* gives a fair paraphrase.

Ver. 4.—I will answer him that cometh, etc. The two last words represent the K'ri, or marginal reading of the Hebrew; the "therein" of the Revised Version, the Kh'ti or written text. Probably we should read, as in ver. 7, "I will answer him *by myself*" (Hitzig).

Ver. 5.—That I may take the house of Israel, etc. The words are a threat rather than a promise. The "double-hearted" shall be taken in the snare which they have made for themselves.

Ver. 6.—Turn yourselves, etc.; literally, *turn them.* But there is no sufficient ground for the margin, "Turn *others*," the objective suffix being the "faces" of the following clause. In ch. xviii. 30, 32 the verb is used by itself. The prophet's call is to a direct personal repentance, not to the work of preaching that repentance to others.

Ver. 7.—The stranger that sojourneth among you. It is noticeable that Ezekiel uses here and elsewhere (ch. xlvii. 22, 23) the familiar phrase of the books which most influenced his teaching (Lev. xvi.—xxv.; Numb. ix., xv; Deut. *passim*). It is probable that some such proselytes were found among the exiles of Tel-Abib. **I the Lord will answer him by myself, etc.** This, as has been seen, was probably the right reading in ver. 4. What it means is that, instead of a spoken answer by the mouth of the prophet, there should be an answer in the discipline of life, in the immediate utterance through the conscience, which was the voice of God. The inquirer who came with unconfessed and unrepented hankerings after the worship of other gods deserved and would receive no other answer.

Ver. 8.—To make him, add, with Revised Version, **an astonishment**; or better, *I will make him amazed*, as in ch. xxxii. 10. The words are an echo of Deut. xxviii. 37. The man's punishment shall be open and notorious, so as to strike terror into others.

Ver. 9.—I the Lord have deceived that

prophet, etc. The teaching of modern thought is to soften language like this into "I have permitted him to be deceived." The distinction was seldom, if ever, present to the mind of the Old Testament, or indeed of the New Testament, writers. It is Jehovah who sends the "lying spirit" in 1 Kings xxii. 20—23. It is he who in the latter days shall send men "strong delusions" that they shall believe a lie (2 Thess. ii. 11). In both cases it is implied that the delusion is a righteous punishment, is indeed the natural, because the divinely appointed, punishment of the sin. *Populus vult decipi et decipiatur*, but the very deception is a means for undeceiving them. At last their eyes shall be opened. The punishment of the false prophet and of those who trust him is at once retributive, and a discipline, and, if the discipline fails for them, at least a warning for others.

Ver. 11.—The words come as a gleam of light through the darkness. A restored nation, walking in the truth, the true people of God,—this lies beyond the mystery of the evil which is allowed, or even made, to work itself out to the bitter end.

Vers. 12—14.—A new section begins, implying as before an interval of silence. What follows presents a striking parallelism to Jer. xv. 1, 2. There also we have the "four sore judgments," the declaration that not even the presence of Moses and Samuel would avail to save the people. They were obviously selected by Jeremiah as examples of the power of intercession (Exod. xxxii. 11, 12; 1 Sam. vii. 9; xii. 23). Ezekiel's selection of names proceeds on a different footing. He chooses exceptional instances of saintliness that had been powerless to save the generation in which they lived; perhaps, also, such as were well known, not only in the records of Israel, but among other nations. Noah had not saved the evil race before the Flood; Job had not saved his sons (Job i. 18); Daniel, though high in the king's favour, had not been able to influence Nebuchadnezzar to spare the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The mention of this last name is significant, as showing the reputation which even then Daniel had acquired. There is no shadow of evidence for the view of some commentators that an older Daniel is referred to. Had there been such a person, eminent enough to be grouped with Noah and Job, there would surely have been some mention of him in the Old Testament. In ver. 13, for the land, read "*a* land." For staff of bread, see ch. iv. 16. The phrase comes from Lev. xxvi. 26.

Ver. 15.—Noisome beasts (see note on ch. v. 17).

Ver. 19.—Pestilence is joined with blood, as in ch. v. 17; xxxviii. 22, as indicating its death-bearing character.

Ver. 22.—The words end with a gleam of hope shining through the judgments. For Ezekiel, as for Isaiah, there is the thought of a "remnant that shall return" (Isa. x. 20—22). It has been questioned whether "the ways and the doings" which are to bring comfort to men's minds are those of the evil past or of the subsequent repentance. I incline to the view that they include both. Men should see at once the severity and the goodness of Jehovah. His punishments had not been arbitrary nor excessive. They had also been as a discipline leading men to repentance. In each of those facts there was a ground of comfort for men who asked the question, which Abraham asked of old, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25). In either aspect men will recognize that God has not done *without cause* all that he has done. In this way the prophet seeks, as others have done since, to justify the ways of God to man. Ezekiel's word for "remnant" is, it may be noted, not the same as Isaiah's, its primary significance being "these that *escape*." Ezekiel does not quote the earlier prophet, though his thoughts are in harmony with him.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*Idols in the heart.* I. THE HEART IS THE SEAT OF IDOLATRY. There may be splendid temples in a city, containing innumerable idols—horrible monsters or beautiful statues, works of marble, ivory, or gold. Yet if the people do not worship them no sin is committed. We have many idols in our museums. The idols in a missionary society's museum do no harm to its custodians. On the other hand, though no idol-temple stands in our land, and the last vestige of the old heathenism has been swept away centuries ago, and the very notion of worshipping stocks and stones seems to us ridiculous, yet in our hearts there may be things which alienate us from God. The essential question is as to what is there enthroned as in the citadel of the soul.

II. EVERYTHING THAT TAKES THE PLACE OF GOD IN THE HEART IS AN IDOL. It is not everything loved that we are to regard as an idol. God does not claim the only affection of our hearts. We may love God through the love we bear to those earthly friends who are dear to us. But God claims the first place, the throne within. Whatever stands first in our estimation is our god. If some human affection, pleasure, or sin takes this pre-eminent position, and refuses to yield, when required, to the supreme will of God, that is our god, our idol.

III. Idols in the heart exclude communion with God. It is in reference to people who cherish such idols that God asks, "Should I be inquired of at all by them?" It is not likely that such people would be disposed to seek counsel from the true spiritual God. The idols would seem to be sufficient. But if they should think to add the worship of the supreme God to that of their idols, they would find that this is impossible. There are men for whom all access to God is cut off. They who cherish evil things or any rival affections, made evil by rivalry with the true love of the soul for God, find that they cannot reach to God. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Observe, however, this only applies to idolatry in the heart. Heathen people who follow the instincts of natural religion and feel after the unseen spiritual God may find him, though they have scores of idols in their houses, because such a genuine search for God implies the expulsion of idols from the heart.

IV. Idolatry in the heart will not be neglected by God. We may disown God and substitute our idols. But he will not, cannot, give us up. He is still our Lord, and he must take note of the rebellion of his people. But he is also still our Father, and, though we may not care for him, he has not ceased to love us. Therefore he will seek his idolatrous children and plague them with many a trouble, until he has induced them to see their folly, cast their idols out of their hearts, and welcome back their Lord to his rightful throne.

Ver. 6.—*Repentance.* I. The first step towards salvation is repentance. It is true that God has moved towards us before we have thought of turning to him. It is his goodness that leads us to repentance (Rom. ii. 4). "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). But all this precedes our action. When we begin to see salvation, the first step must lead us to the wicket-gate of repentance, and until that has been passed through there is no hope for us. John the Baptist prepares the way for Christ. "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We may try the short cut of pride, and think to begin the happy Christian life without owning our sins and turning from them. It is impossible. The result will only be a miserable hypocrisy.

II. Repentance consists in turning from the evil way. "Repent, and turn yourselves," etc. It is an action, not merely a feeling. It cannot be without deep grief of soul, yet it does not consist in the grief; that is but an accompaniment, though undoubtedly an inevitable accompaniment. We cannot measure our repentance by the number of tears shed, but by the thoroughness of our revolt against our past. Neither is there any value in the amount of time spent in abject contrition. We are not in this way to consider whether we have repented sufficiently. The sole question is as to the reality and thoroughness of the change by which we turn from the old way and seek a better way.

III. Repentance is confirmed by the abandonment of the evil once loved. The penitents are to turn from their "idols." Insincere repentance weeps for the sins it still clings to. The action of repentance is inward. But its consequences are seen in outward conduct. Savonarola, when called to the dying-bed of Lorenzo di Medici, refused to offer any hope of pardon to the great Florentine, because, though he professed great concern for his soul, and deep grief for his sins, he refused to give back their liberties to the citizens. He would not act according to the profession of repentance, and therefore the stern reformer justly judged that the penitence could not be true and thorough.

IV. Repentance is met by the saving grace of God. He calls upon us to repent, but he does not require us to create new hearts in ourselves. He expects a sincere desire for a better way. We must show our loathing for our old past by doing all in our power to relinquish it. Then God gives that redeeming grace which is the new birth, and whence springs the power for better living. Still, after receiving the grace, we need to preserve the lowliness of the penitent, although all tears are wiped away by the pardon of God. For we are always in danger of being dragged back into our old selves. "Illusion is brief," says Schiller, "but repentance is long."

Ver. 7.—*God's answer.* "I the Lord will answer him by myself." The people inquire of the false prophets, but God himself will answer them. The question concerning the coming danger will be settled by the event. That will be God's answer, and it will put an end to all doubt on the one side, and to all deception on the other.

I. THE PROMISE OF GOD'S ANSWER. There are questions which grievously perplex us, and to which, as yet, we can get no reply. Those that are frivolous may never be answered; *e.g.* Clement's illustration, "Whether the number of the stars be odd or even?" It can be of no use for us to know the answer to such a question. No doubt there are also greater problems which still do not concern us personally, and of these we may never have the solution. There is no reason to suppose that we shall ever become omniscient. But, on the other hand, there are deep, heart-searching questions, which bear directly upon our life. We crave an answer to such questions, and God will not leave us for ever in the dark concerning them. We may have our patience tried for a season, but at length the light will dawn.

II. THE SOURCE OF GOD'S ANSWER. It will come direct from himself. The foolish Jews inquired of false prophets. But not even a true prophet such as Ezekiel would be entrusted with the reply. God himself is to answer them. God does not act by proxy. He has servants and agents. But he is in them, and he can dispense with them altogether whenever he chooses. He has direct dealings with souls. If the answer comes from God, it must be true and sufficient. In momentous questions concerning the soul and its eternal life we cannot be satisfied with a reply from any delegated authority, not from the greatest prophet, apostle, or archangel. We want to hear the voice of God himself.

III. THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S ANSWER. In the present case it was to be given by events. The destruction of Jerusalem was to be God's answer to the disputing Jews. That was as truly a Divine answer as a voice from heaven would have been, for the voice would have been a shaping of air-waves, a work of God in nature. This event was God's working in providence. God speaks to us through his providence. History is a record of God's answers to man's questions. Such an answer has many merits. 1. *It is perceptible to all.* The fall of Jerusalem sent a shock through the Jewish world. 2. *It is clear and unmistakable.* God had threatened judgment. Would his threat prove true? Who could doubt the meaning of the terrible response? 3. *It is irreversible.* An event which has once occurred can never be undone. The lessons of history are eternal.

IV. THE ADVENT OF GOD'S ANSWER. 1. *It may come unsought.* The faithless Jews neglected their God, and inquired for oracles from the false prophets. Yet he of whom they sought no word spoke by the awful thunders of judgment. 2. *It may come from an unexpected quarter.* These unbelieving Jews were not expecting to hear the voice of God. Therefore they were made to hear it in most terrible tones. It is better not to wait for such a startling reply. God has spoken in the great events of Bethlehem and Calvary, and there his voice is one of grace and benediction.

Ver. 10.—*The prophet's punishment.* The prophet is to be punished equally with the rest of the people, because his guilt is equal to theirs. The pleas and excuses which he might suggest are all swept away as so many refuges of lies.

I. ECCLESIASTICAL RANK. There was a recognized professional distinction between the prophets and the people; the prophets belonged to a separate order. But "orders" have no saving efficacy. The status of the Christian ministry affords certain earthly privileges, while it confers certain spiritual obligations. But it is only economic, temporary, and for this world's service. Before God the distinction between cleric and laic vanishes, and each soul stands in its simple human character. God judges an archbishop as a man, not as a dignitary. His office appertains to his powers and duties, the talents for which he will have to account. But in this respect it is like the office of any other person—a measure for his service, not a shelter for his sinfulness. In the world beyond the grave each soul is but a soul; rank and office are left behind like cast-off vestments. Therefore the sinful ecclesiastic will be treated as any other sinner.

II. DIVINE GIFTS. The false prophets of Ezekiel's day do not appear to have had any peculiar Divine gifts. They were mere pretenders. But even those men who are especially endowed are not to consider themselves as thereby lifted above common standards of judgment. The prophet of Bethel was a true messenger from God, yet a lion met him in the way and slew him for his disobedience (1 Kings xiii. 26). The apostle may "have the gift of prophecy," yet if he "have not charity" he is "nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 2).

III. Knowledge. If the prophets did not know the right way, they should have made themselves acquainted with it, for they were supposed to hold the keys of revelation. But as the signpost never reaches the city to which it is constantly pointing, the man who knows the way, and who is capable of showing it to others, may yet be never treading it himself. Then his knowledge will not save him. It is the same in respect to those who are enlightened by Divine teaching, though they are not called upon to teach others. A clear conception of "the plan of salvation" will not save a man. If a prophet will be punished like any other man, surely the merely orthodox believer in the dogmas of the Church will stand in a similar position of peril if he does not add practice to creed.

IV. Popularity. Those guilty prophets of Israel were popular men. Their doom was to suffer the fate of the people they fawned upon. A moment's reflection must make it apparent that the favour of the world, and even the favour of the Church, are no guarantees for the favour of Heaven; for men may be deceived or may judge by low, unworthy standards. But appearances are so flattering that people fall into the snare, and take comfort from the thought that all is going well with them among men. The one vital question is, "How do we stand before God?"

Ver. 11.—***Religious reciprocity.*** The relations of the soul with God are reciprocal. There is first of all a mutual approach, and there will be a communion so long as the religion is a living fact. The mutual relationship may be looked at from either of its centres. But first its common character must be considered.

I. Religion consists in spiritual ownership. There is an appropriation on both sides. This involves certain important facts. 1. *Close connection.* We hold what we own. It is true a man in England may be the proprietor of an estate in New Zealand, but even then he is connected with it by immediate agency. Religion implies a close relation between the soul and God. 2. *Powers of use.* We have rights over what we own. The inheritance which is so tied up that the heir cannot touch it or do anything with it, is scarcely to be called property; the rights of ownership are shadowy indeed in such a case. Real ownership confers rights and powers. So it is in religion. The mutual ownership here confers mutual rights and powers. 3. *Value.* A man may own what is worthless—leagues of Siberia or tons of desert sand. Still, as a rule, he makes the most of his property, and if he is proud of owning anything, we may be sure that he values it. Now, the mutual religious ownership of God and the soul is referred to in a way to show that it is prized.

II. The spiritual ownership of the Bible is reciprocal. 1. *God owns the souls of his people.* "That they may be my people" is the expression in regard to God's design in the discipline of Israel. God regards his people as his "inheritance" (Ps. xxviii. 9). (1) He has close relations with them. Truly connected with all his children, he draws more near to his own people, and communicates himself especially to them. (2) He exercises special powers over them. God has a double right to command his confessed servants. (3) He values them, as his jewels (Mal. iii. 17), as the "apple of his eye" (Ps. xvii. 8). 2. *God's people own God.* They do not only confess his Name. (1) They realize a close fellowship with him. (2) They have rights of access and privileges of reconciled children in the home which do not as yet belong to the poor, wandering prodigals. (3) They value these privileges, or, if they do not, they are like the elder son of the parable, and do not truly realize their ownership in God. It is indeed a great joy to be able to say, "*My* God."

III. The establishing and confirming of this reciprocal relationship is the great end of the discipline of life. It is the re-establishing of an old broken connection. Israel had once stood in this happy relation with God; she had lost it by sin. We are all God's children by birth; but by sin we too have lost the privileges of sonship. The great hindrance lies in our rebellion against God. Israel could not boast of her descent from Abraham, nor of her covenant relationship with God, for the covenant was broken by sin, and the family claim disowned. The only way to secure this happy condition again is to give up the newer connection with sin. Now, God sends severe discipline to lead to that result (ver. 10). He uses his rod to drive the wanderer home.

Ver. 14.—*Noah, Daniel, and Job.* I. THE SPLENDID PRE-EMINENCE OF NOAH, DANIEL, AND JOB. These three men are selected from ages far apart, and from the greatest diversity of circumstances. In temperament and external history there is little resemblance between them. Noah the patriarch looms on the horizon of history in epic grandeur; Daniel is the brave hero in a tyrant's court, and the man of skill and science in a civilized society; Job belongs to the region of pastoral life, and his tragic story carries us out among the Bedouin. So wide is the range of excellence! Good men are not confined to one age, nor to one set of circumstances, nor to one school of thought, nor to one style of life. They are not found exclusively in antiquity, in modern times, in town, in the country, among the great, among the simple. There is a breadth and a variety in the possibilities of saintliness. We need not all copy one type. He who cannot emulate the knowledge of Daniel may follow the patience of Job. Nevertheless, in spite of these diversities, there are certain great common features that belong to the three Old Testament saints, and account for the present association of their names. 1. All three were *holy men*, true to God and upright in life. His goodness is the greatest fact in a good man's character, and it constitutes a bond of union between all the true people of God. 2. All three were *faithful in circumstances of isolation*. They all had to break from prevalent habits, and dare to stand alone—Noah against the world's sin and impenitence, Daniel against heathenism, Job against a false orthodoxy. 3. All three were *sorely tried*. The faith of each was assailed in a severe and most exceptional manner. 4. All three were *victorious by means of firm fidelity*. They conquered, and they conquered in quiet ways—by obedience, patience, faith, and steadfastness.

II. THE USELESSNESS OF THE INTERCESSION OF THESE THREE GREAT SAINTS. Though Noah, Daniel, and Job united to plead for Jerusalem, their intercession would be all in vain. 1. This was *contrary to expectation*. There is power in intercession; there is an especial power in the intercession of a "righteous man" (Jas. v. 16); there is a still greater power in united prayer (Matt. xviii. 20). Yet here the union of three of the very best men, selected from all ages, could not secure the safety of Jerusalem. 2. The cause of the predicted failure of such an intercession was *hardened impenitence*. God is not inexorable. He is ready to listen to prayer; nay, he is more anxious to save than we are to plead for salvation. He sent his Son to save the world, an infinitely greater act than the most impassioned pleading of the best men. Therefore the failure cannot be attributed to his hardness. But it would be unjust and injurious to spare the impenitent on *any* plea. 3. *The intercession of Christ succeeds* where that of the best men fails. His prayers are worth those of ten thousand Noahs and Daniels and Jobs. "He ever liveth to make intercession for us;" and he alone, bearing the weight of the whole world's guilt, makes atonement for the sins of all men with ample sufficiency. We could not trust to the intercession of the saints, even if we were sure of obtaining it; and the words of Ezekiel are only hypothetical, merely by way of illustration. Christ is our one Advocate with the Father. Nevertheless, for the impenitent even his mighty intercession, which shakes the very gates of hell, is ineffectual. Christ shed tears over Jerusalem, yet Jerusalem perished.

Ver. 23.—*Purpose in providence.* I. GOD MAY APPEAR TO ACT WITHOUT CAUSE. We cannot discover design in all the movements of nature so easily as we may detect this in its structure. Though we may be startled at times by the aptness of the providential overruling of history, too often we are perplexed, dismayed, confounded. The wicked man flourishes like a green bay tree, and the good man is persecuted or perishes in a vain conflict with adverse circumstances. Psalmists of old noticed this familiar fact, and grieved over it (*e.g.* Ps. xvii. 10). We must be prepared to expect mystery in nature and providence, since the experience of the past points to the very same difficulties which puzzle and perplex us when they suddenly confront us. "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job xxvi. 14).

II. GOD DOES NOT ACT WITHOUT CAUSE. 1. *The failure to discover a cause is no proof that it does not exist.* We cannot limit the range of existence to the scope of our knowledge. There are hidden physical causes which the most searching scientific analysis has failed to trace: why may there not be also hidden final causes, deep purposes of God, which no mind of man can reach? 2. *The proved purpose of God in known regions suggests the existence of a like purpose in unknown regions.* We can trace more purpose in creation than in providence; but since the same God rules over both, it is to be presumed that the spirit of design which pervades the one runs through the other. We know that God has mind, and that he exercises what with us would be called forethought. Moreover, it is impossible to suppose that his principal dealings with his own children will be aimless when his less momentous works are instinct with purpose. 3. *The righteousness and love of God make it certain that he does not act without a cause.* Reckless action is morally defective. Ethics bears directly on motive and purpose. A just God must have a righteous object with which to act. The love of God emphasizes the assurance of purpose in providence, for no one would treat those dear to him with heedless indifference. This is especially applicable to the infliction of chastisement. A just and merciful God cannot send chastisement without adequate cause.

III. THE CAUSE OF GOD'S ACTION WILL BE ULTIMATELY DECLARED. It is impossible for us to see it yet, for we cannot look beyond the grave, nor can we scale the heights of Divine thought in the infancy of our spiritual experience. The schoolboy cannot see the utility of all his lessons. But if he has been well taught in boyhood, when he is a man he will look back on the hard training with appreciative satisfaction, and will therefore order a similar process for his children. It would not be well for us to see the end yet, for we must be trained by faith. But earthly experience often throws back light on dark passages of life, and they then flash into a new meaning which calls forth gratitude as well as wonder. Beyond this world the fuller explanation will come. With the discovery of the hidden cause there will be ample consolation. The revelation of a good purpose in chastisement is its appropriate consolation (2 Cor. iv. 17).

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—5.—*Idolatry.* It certainly seems strange that, at this period of their national history, the Israelites should be chargeable with the folly and sin of idolatry. The admonitions against this offence had been so numerous, and the chastisements following its commission had been so severe, that the reader of Old Testament history is surprised to find that at so late a period the temptation had not been outgrown.

I. THE MULTITUDE AND VARIETY OF THE IDOLATRIES OF ISRAEL. The chosen people were exposed to corruption from neighbouring peoples—from the Phœnicians upon the north, the Syrians and Chaldeans upon the east, and the Egyptians upon the south. Each of these idolatries had its own characteristics, and in some way sprang from, and ministered to, the evil passions of human nature. It would almost seem as if the kings, the great men of the land, and the common people generally, chose such idols as harmonized with their own tastes or suited their own convenience. At all events, the prophet speaks of *idols*, in the plural, of the multitude of the idols, and of every idolater's own special and peculiar divinities.

II. THE SEAT OF THESE IDOLATRIES. The people are said to have set them up "in their heart." Hills, valleys, groves, high places, and altars and temples, were indeed consecrated, or rather desecrated, by idol-worship. But all this was external. There was something much worse; the idols were set up in the inner nature of the worshippers, and there were honoured and served. That is to say, the belief in the government of a righteous and holy God having been abandoned, many of the Israelites exalted the vices and crimes which the deities of the heathen embodied, sanctioned, and encouraged, and came in their hearts to love the evils against which, as a nation, they were called to witness.

III. THE ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD WHICH IDOLATRY PRODUCED. In setting up the idols in their hearts the people had been putting "a stumbling-block of iniquity" before their face. The idols came between them and their God. The house of Israel, Jehovah exclaims, "are all estranged from me through their idols." There can be no rivalry between the false gods and the true. The choice has ever to be made. To exalt an idol, a passion, a taste, a habit, an association, to a position above that occupied by the supreme Lord of all, is to dethrone him from his rightful place, to forfeit his regard, to ensure his displeasure.

IV. THE INDIGNANT RESPONSE OF GOD TO THE DISHONOUR DONE TO HIM. It was presumed that, with wicked inconsistency, some of the Israelites who had been seduced into idolatrous practices would nevertheless in some time of perplexity or affliction resort to the prophets of Jehovah to seek counsel, guidance, and comfort. In such circumstances, how would their conduct be regarded by the Lord? The word of the Lord to the prophet should be attentively considered, "Should I be inquired of at all by them? . . . I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols." We are not to believe that any sincere, lowly, penitent, and believing suppliant would be rejected. But those who in their hearts cherished the idolatry which was their shame, and yet for some selfish purposes had the effrontery to approach the Lord for counsel and for help, were assured that their application should meet with no favourable response. They were double-hearted and insincere; and for such there is no blessing, and indeed no tolerance.

APPLICATION. It is the same to-day. If with all your hearts ye truly seek him, the request shall not be offered in vain. But it is useless to draw near to God with the lips while the heart is far from him.—T.

Ver. 6.—*Repent!* This was the admonition of every herald of God, whether under the old covenant or the new. It was the burden of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and it was also the burden of John the forerunner and of Jesus the Messiah. From this it may be inferred that human nature and life, on the one hand, and the character and government of God on the other hand, are such that repentance is an indispensable condition of the establishment of right relations between God and man.

I. THE NEED OF REPENTANCE. If we are upon Divine authority summoned to change, this must be because there is something wrong and reprehensible and dangerous in man's heart and condition; if called upon to turn, we must be going the wrong way. The admonition of the text follows upon a picture of Israel's idolatry and rebellion against a righteous God. The form of the sin may vary, but the principle of sin is ever the same. Whether in ancient or in modern times, in barbarous or in civilized states of society, men are universally prone to sin and guilty of sin. Where there is no sin, repentance is needless. It is in the departure of the heart's affection and the life's loyalty from the righteous God that man's error lies. Israel's idolatry symbolizes human iniquity.

II. THE NATURE OF REPENTANCE. As more fully explained in New Testament Scripture, this is a change of heart, of disposition, leading to a change of character and of life. Mere sorrow for sin is not repentance, inasmuch as emotion of every kind is to some extent matter of temperament, and sorrow does not always lead to reformation. True repentance goes much deeper, and prepares the way for every spiritual blessing. He who repents looks at things otherwise than before, turns his thoughts into another channel, his steps into another path.

III. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE. 1. It is a *gracious* call. The justly offended sovereign may leave the rebel to the consequences of his acts. It is not thus that God deals with us. It is not his wish that any should perish. He sends his messengers to the offending race, with a summons to submission, with proffers of mercy. 2. It is an *authoritative* call. He *commandeth* men everywhere to repent. It is true that our Creator and Judge does not interfere with our liberty. Yet he publishes his will as binding upon every moral agent. He has a right to our repentance. It is our place to obey his summons, to offer the repentance which he demands and requires at our hands.

IV. THE DIFFICULTY OF REPENTANCE. This lies in the very character itself of the change. If verbal submission or outward conformity only were required, this would be comparatively easy. But God, who searcheth the heart, will not be satisfied save with the heart's subjection and conversion. Old habits of unspirituality, worldliness, and selfishness are not readily abandoned. Especially in advanced life a radical and inward change is effected, for the most part, only with effort and difficulty. It needs a supernatural motive and a supernatural power to cause old things to pass away and all things to become new, to exchange darkness for light, and the service of Satan for God. Such a supernatural motive we have in the gospel; such a supernatural power and agency in the Holy Spirit.

V. THE FRUITS OF REPENTANCE. 1. These are exactly opposed in character to the fruits of self-indulgence. Other seed in other soil yields other harvest. 2. Reconciliation with God replaces enmity towards God. The conditions of salvation, as laid down in the New Testament, are "repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." 3. Repentance works a change in a man's own character; the principles and motives and ends of life are all new. 4. Through the power of repentance a man's relations to his fellow-men are changed—justice takes the place of wrong, and love that of hatred and uncharitableness.—T.

Ver. 10.—*The misleader and the misled.* One of the features of Israelitish life at this epoch of the Captivity was the evident number and power of false prophets. General excitement and change are, of course, favourable to imposture. Men sought everywhere for guidance, comfort, hope; but, instead of having recourse to the authorized prophets of the Lord, they went to the pretentious and deceptive religious guides who seem to have traded upon the misfortunes of their country. These men were in the habit of saying what was expected and desired, of uttering smooth things, of buoying up the people with the hope that threatening calamities might be averted. Thus the effect of these men's counsels was to prevent the people from true repentance and to hasten the country's ruin. Ezekiel was directed to denounce these misleaders of the nation, and to declare that they should participate in the approaching calamities. "The punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him."

I. PROPHET AND PEOPLE WERE PARTAKERS IN SIN. The sin in essence was departure from God. Those who should have repaired to the Source of all wisdom and authority turned aside, and "sought unto" ignorant, self-seeking impostors. In this they sinned; and the sin was shared by those to whom they had recourse. These pretended prophets knowingly misled the people; for they saw no vision and heard no voice, and their utterances were dictated, not by the law of Divine righteousness, but by the aims of human policy. People and prophets sinned together, and sinned alike.

II. PROPHET AND PEOPLE WERE PARTAKERS IN CONSEQUENT ERROR. The counsel which was thus given and accepted, and consequently acted upon, led the people astray. The only hope for Jerusalem and for the Jews was a general humiliation, confession, and repentance, a turning unto the Lord. From such a course they were deterred by the deception which they practised upon one another, and the delusion which they mutually encouraged. Hence the error into which they were misled, the error of continued idolatry, unbelief, and rebellion.

III. PROPHET AND PEOPLE WERE PARTAKERS IN COMMON PUNISHMENT. It would have been unjust to punish only those who were led astray, for their false guides and evil counsellors were to blame for misleading them. It would have been unjust to punish only the false prophets; for these men were induced and encouraged to practise their deceiving arts by the readiness of their dupes to receive and to act upon their advice. Hence a common guilt entailed a common penalty. There was little distinction in crime; there was little distinction in punishment. Retribution is a fact in the government of the Supreme, who can never look upon iniquity. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished."—T.

Ver. 11.—*The purposes of punishment.* No thoughtful person can believe that the supreme Lord of all inflicts punishments upon men because he delights in the sufferings of his creatures, or is indifferent to those sufferings. This passage of Scripture, like other passages, teaches us that, when God punishes, it is with a view to the good of those who are punished, or of others, or of both.

I. THE IMMEDIATE AND REMEDIAL PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT. It is a question how far punishment should aim at the correction of the individual offender, how far at the production of a wholesome impression upon society. Whether the false prophets and those who resorted to them were spared to profit by the chastisement which befell them, we have not the means of judging. But in any case the punitive afflictions were intended for the general good of the house of Israel. 1. Radical error is corrected. "That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me." 2. The habits of transgressors are reformed. "Neither defile themselves any more with all their transgressions."

II. THE ULTIMATE AND POSITIVE PURPOSE OF PUNISHMENT. The remedy for disease must first be applied, then health will follow. So it is in spiritual things. Forgiveness is a means to sanctification. Salvation is both from sin and unto obedience and holiness. Accordingly, the prophet represents the re-establishment, the fresh ratification, of the covenant between God and Israel as the final purpose of all the chastening inflicted. The two sides of this covenant are presented as in their harmony and completeness justifying the discipline appointed by Divine wisdom and beneficence. 1. "That they may be my people." That is, not only in name, but in reality; not only *de jure*, but *de facto*. 2. "That I may be their God." That is, theirs to acknowledge with sincere reverence, to love with devotion and fervour, and to serve with diligence and fidelity.—T.

Ver. 14.—*Illustrious piety.* Ezekiel was especially commissioned to set forth and to impress upon the people the individual, the personal, aspect of religion. In many places, as here, he lays stress upon the accountability of each several man to God. One cannot deliver another from deserved punishment. Each must answer for himself, must reap the reward of his deeds, whether good or evil. A man's piety cannot save his ungodly neighbour when the time of reckoning and judgment arrives. No matter how good our friends may be, their goodness does not excuse our irreligion. If the city has sinned, the city must suffer. Even if the wisest and the best of men are in it and plead for it, the city cannot be justified or spared for their sake. Men so conspicuous for virtue and piety as Noah, Daniel, and Job have not power to save the land from famine, from the sword, from noisome beasts, from the pestilence, when these are sent as chastisements from the Lord of all.

I. THE VIRTUES FOR WHICH THESE THREE MEN WERE CELEBRATED. Why these, rather than other illustrious instances of human goodness, were selected is a question which cannot be answered with certainty. But the context disposes the student of this passage of prophecy to consider these men as instances of remarkable piety in the midst of surrounding ungodliness. Thus Noah stands in contrast with the self-indulgent and irreligious population of the world immediately before the Flood; as a preacher of righteousness, he protested against the sins and the secularism and unbelief of his time. Daniel also was "faithful among the faithless;" he and a selected few were called upon to witness against the idolatry of their heathen rulers and masters, and against much unfaithfulness on the part of their companions in captivity. Job was a true servant of Jehovah, who was encompassed by idolatries to which he did not yield, and who alone of his own kindred was faithful to his God in all his ways. These three men all saw disasters come upon those with whom they were associated. If they could not deliver their neighbours in the day of judgment, if their virtues and piety availed only for themselves, was it credible that their presence in Jerusalem would save the city and the land from destruction? It is observable that the "righteousness" of these three men is admitted, and with commendation, by the Lord God himself. There may be danger in praising and flattering the good because of their goodness. But there are occasions when it is just and right to acknowledge the moral excellence, the human merit, of men, always with a clear understanding that all goodness is from God, that in his view all human character is imperfect, and that nothing can be claimed from him as a just reward even by the purest and the most useful among mankind.

II. THE FAVOUR WITH WHICH THESE THREE MEN WERE REGARDED. It was an honour to be selected by a good man and a prophet like Ezekiel for special approval and commendation. But it was a higher honour to be mentioned thus by the direction of the Lord God himself. It is not erroneous to attribute to the Eternal a personal interest in the sons of time, a regard of that nature with which one who judges with justice and appreciation esteems the excellent among his fellow-beings. On the contrary, Scripture justifies us in taking such a view of our Father God, who is never represented as indifferent and heartless, but rather as looking with satisfaction and favour upon those who delight in his Law and do his will. There have been occasions upon which the intercessory prayers offered by such have been received with favour, and have been graciously answered, to the relief and comfort of those for whom they have been presented.

III. The powerlessness of even such righteous and beloved servants of God to deliver the rebellious from punishment. It is evidently intended to convey the impression that God was willing to do great things at the intercession of men so good and so favoured as those named; but that he would not for their sake contradict his own declarations, reverse his own laws, and abandon his own moral government. Hence the lesson may be learnt that "every man shall bear his own burden," that in the day of account no man shall deliver his brother. No hope can be vainer than that of those who rely for their salvation upon the merits and influence of their family, their friends, their Church, however dear to God. It is plain that, as religion is a personal matter, as its claims come home to the individual, every hearer of God's Word is bound to use for himself those means by which he may, by God's grace, be delivered from the chain of sin and the doom of death.—T.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The reasonableness of God's action.* There is that in human nature to which religion appeals, and by which religion asks to be judged. Religion does indeed speak with authority, but the authority is that of wisdom and righteousness. Man's judgment and conscience approve the order of Divine providence, and the tenor of Divine revelation. More particularly, upon the suggestion of this passage, it should be remarked that—

I. The dealings of God include both judgment and sparing mercy. The prophet speaks both of "the sore judgments upon Jerusalem," and also of "the remnant that shall be brought forth, both sons and daughters." God is ever a God of justice and a God of mercy.

II. God's dealings often perplex observers. "His ways are in the great waters." "Who can by searching find out God?" The firmest believer in Divine providence has frequent occasion to confess his utter inability to explain the events which happen around him. Why are some men prosperous, whilst others pass through affliction and calamity? Why do some escape in seasons of disaster, whilst others are overwhelmed? Why are God's ways often to all appearance inconsistent with a regard to the equitable treatment of the wicked and the good? Such questions ever recur. They may, indeed, in the case of some observers, never be put; but when put they cannot be answered.

III. Yet to reflecting minds God's dealings do, on the whole, appear consistent with reason and righteousness. Individual facts may be difficult to reconcile with our religious beliefs, but general principles and laws, when we rise to them, are recognized as just and good. And the higher the view we take of human nature and human life, the more do anomalies disappear. If we clearly perceive that man is made for goodness, and not for enjoyment, that the earthly life is a discipline and a preparation, that the great end of all is that man may share the Divine nature and the Divine life,—such convictions will help us to see and feel the wisdom and the goodness that distinguish God's government of men. There is in God's ways no error and no caprice.

IV. God's dealings with nations, as with individuals, are intended to promote moral improvement. The expression used is very remarkable. The Lord assures those who observe his treatment of Israel that upon reflection they shall be "comforted" concerning the evil brought upon Jerusalem. The wisdom, and even the true benevolence, of the Divine ways shall in due time be made apparent. The cause for which what has been done has been ordered by providence shall be recognized and shall be approved as justifying the great Ruler and his government. Thus shall his Name be glorified.—T.

Vers. 1—11.—*Disastrous answers to prayer.* Ezekiel's predictions had been so gloomy and adverse, that the elders of Israel in Babylon were staggered. They could not acquiesce in their nation's ruin. Hopeful that some message more favourable might come from God, they sought (it may be on the sabbath day) the prophet's presence. We must not place these elders in the same category with *those* in Jerusalem who preferred the flattering speeches of the false prophets. Nevertheless, they were not right at heart. The taint of idolatry was upon these also. Good and evil may be mingled in men's hearts in different degrees.

I. OUTWARD TROUBLE OFTEN DRIVES MEN TO GOD. It is not always so. It sometimes chafes and exasperates men. In their pain they sometimes curse God and blaspheme him yet the more. Perhaps affliction, in itself, has no softening, subduing influence. But the Spirit of God frequently uses affliction as his instrument, his pruning-knife, in order to make the soul fruitful. This much is certain, that many have found a season of affliction a season of salvation. Certain it is that "whom the Lord loveth he correcteth;" and not a few of the redeemed adopt David's language as their own, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy Word."

II. YET THE RETURN IS SOMETIMES OUTWARD, NOT COMPLETE. In human nature there is a strong bias to be satisfied with what is merely outward in religion. To utter words of prayer, we imagine, must be successful. To come into God's house, no matter what may be our motives or intentions, we think, must please God. Do we not confer a favour on him? Has he not engaged to do us good? Yet how often is the heart away when the body is present? How often do we bring our idols with us into that sacred place? How often do we worship mammon, or pleasure, or fashion, under pretence of worshipping God? How often do our *words* far exceed our desires? Hypocrisy and idolatry are as common in sanctuaries now as in the days of ancient Israel. Frequently the heart is preoccupied with its own wishes and plans and ambitions, while we are using the words, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" We want our own ends, while we profess to yield unto God.

III. GOD REPLIES, NOT TO OUR WORDS, BUT TO OUR TEMPER OF MIND. "I the Lord will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols." Men often think that they lay a trap for God, but God takes them in their own snare. We try to use God for the attainment of some worldly end, and we think sometimes that we succeed, but we are always outwitted. Men's words are often veils to hide the facts, and we may deceive others; we cannot deceive God. To give to such men blessing would be to do them harm. For such the only real blessing is self-humiliation, inward contrition. True faith in God is the only measure of success, and faith is loyal, candid, self-submissive. Four sympathetic men brought a paralytic to Jesus; but Jesus first read the yearning desire of the sufferer's heart, and said, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." For God is a Spirit, and deals with the human spirit. Therefore in prayer we should always imitate David, "I lift up my soul unto thee."

IV. GOD'S AIM IS LOFTIER THAN THE AIM OF THE SUPPLIANT. The aim of the suppliant is usually temporary relief—deliverance from some present evil. But God sees that present trouble is the best blessing—the rough husk that contains nourishing meat. Our object is enjoyment; God's object is soul-profit. He yearns to see repentance—the first cry of the new life. "Thus saith the Lord God; Repent." God's aim is remote, but right noble. His design is that "the house of Israel may go no more astray." His purpose is that "they may be my people, and I may be their God." If we will not allow God's purpose to prevail, he will not allow our low and vain purposes to succeed. If we set ourselves in hostility against God, only ruin can result. If God sends us to Nineveh, and we sail away to Tarshish, we may expect to meet an overwhelming storm. God's will must become our will; then only shall we have rest.

V. GOD TURNS UNSUCCESSFUL SUPPLIANTS INTO BEACONS. "I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb." As battle-fields, saturated with human gore, yield larger crops of grain, so out of all evil God will bring ultimate good. Cain's published sin served as a restraint upon others. Lot's wife became a standing witness for God and for righteousness. In the long run, everything contributes to the good of mankind. The wrath of man shall bring praise to God. Man's crime at Calvary has become the fount of greatest blessing. Even human sin shall serve as a dark background, the better to set forth the brilliant hues of Divine mercy. Yet how slow men are to note the various warnings which God sets up! Self-examination is a rare virtue.

VI. Answered prayer may be heaviest disaster. The Gadarenes prayed that Jesus would depart out of their coasts, and he departed. The man who has practised deceit shall be himself deceived. Pharaoh hardened his heart against God until at length God joined in the process: "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." He who will not accept any answer from God except that which chimes in with his own wishes shall have his wish gratified, but it will prove his ruin. To Ephraim God at last said, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone." He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit is "in danger of eternal sin." And this is the heaviest punishment a man can receive. "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." The most notable example of this principle in God's government is seen in the case of Ahab. He had set his heart upon war against Ramoth-Gilead. He would not be dissuaded. Yet he wished to have the appearance of God's approval, in order to gain allies. At length the Lord said, "Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead?" "And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and shalt prevail also." If foolish men prefer flattering delusions to the naked truth, God will at length abandon them to this fatal influence. He punishes sin with sin.

VII. The law of righteousness allows of no exemption. Pauper and prince are amenable to the same law in the kingdom of God. "The punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him." No office, however honourable, will serve as a cloak for sin, nor alleviate the weight of punishment. Righteousness deals with man as man, and takes no note of names or titles. If a king drinks poison, it produces the selfsame effect as if a ploughboy drank it. It will avail us nothing to say to the white-robed Judge, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" Office may increase our responsibility; it does not add to our purity; it gives no passport to heaven. Not genius, nor power, commends men to God; only moral goodness. "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."—D.

Vers. 12—23.—*Human atonement valueless.* The hopeful among the Jews probably remembered that in times of former correction God had yielded, in some measure, to the intercessions of the saints. If they had not gained all that they asked, they had gained some advantage. Why might that not occur again? Might not God concede some of his demand? This was impossible, for the first necessity was that righteous government be maintained. No good can ever come to men by tampering with righteousness.

I. Sin against God is an immeasurable evil. It is a common thing for men to affect surprise at the severity of God's chastisement. Yet this is only an outcome of their ignorance. They have no conception of the tremendous evil of sin. Its magnitude defies all human measurement. We cannot follow it into all its ramifications of mischief. We see the beginning of the vicious stream; the ending is beyond our sight. It is an injury to the moral universe, and we cannot estimate it. Had Eve foreseen all the painful results of taking the forbidden fruit, surely she would have resisted the tempter.

II. Flagrant sin demands every sort of penalty. It is not always possible for men to discriminate between great sins and small; yet even men can discover when sin becomes rapidly contagious, and when it is largely influential for evil. When a man, by a plausible embellishment of vice, entraps ten thousand others into the snare, and makes his vice fashionable, popular, universal,—his sin is heinous. As for a disease that has become epidemic the severest remedies are employed, so when a sin becomes national, terrible chastisement is demanded. To vindicate his righteous law, God sometimes employs the scourge of pestilence; sometimes famine; sometimes war; sometimes a plague of locusts. But when iniquity breaks out with virulence, or becomes aggravated and stubborn, he will combine all his methods of chastisement, in order to cleanse the land. Always his punishments are well-apportioned, never excessive. The balance is in the hand of Infinite Wisdom.

III. Men are influential for good according to their righteousness. The messenger of Jehovah singles out for mention three men who were eminent for piety and faith. His language implies that if any men could prevail with God to abate his penalties, *these* were the men. It was useless for him to make mention of men of inferior piety. *Any* righteous man would not suffice. To have any hope of success, he must be a man of transcendent purity. This conviction was universal in the minds of the people. It was founded on reason, on experience, on the records of past history. Had not Moses gained a respite for the nation by his righteous intercession? Had not Samuel averted the stroke of Divine anger from Israel? Had not Noah's righteousness secured the safety of seven persons beside himself? Why should it not be so again? Daniel was living among them—a man eminent for loyalty to Jehovah. Were not Jeremiah and Ezekiel interceding for the people? If anything could save the nation from utter destruction, surely it was the righteous zeal of these godly men!

IV. YET HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS IS INCOMPETENT TO ABATE A SINGLE PENALTY FROM OTHERS. A man's personal righteousness will always serve as a screen for himself, never as a shield for others. Far be it from God to destroy the righteous with the wicked! This would be to obliterate eternal distinctions. This would be for God to act against himself. The righteous are safe when dangers are thickest. They have an invulnerable panoply. And the prayers of the righteous have often gained temporary advantages for the unrighteous. Such intercession has obtained a brief respite for repentance—has obtained a postponement of the catastrophe. Yet as a righteous man, however zealous, has no power to transform the moral nature of another man, he cannot deliver him when God appeareth for judgment. Eternal justice is the main pillar of the universe, and, if justice fails, the universe will be shivered.

V. MUCH LESS CAN HUMAN RIGHTEOUSNESS AVERT FROM MEN ALL DIVINE PENALTIES. This is an argument *ad hominem*. If the righteousness of the best men that ever lived cannot quench one fiery dart of God's vengeance, much less can it quench all the darts in God's quiver. There was a propriety in every particular form of chastisement which God employed; it would therefore be unbecoming every attribute of his nature to suspend that chastisement, while the causal sin yet remained. Men little surmise the terrible necessity there is for retribution, because they do not perceive the magnitude of sin. It is a fearful thing to provoke the anger of the living God.

VI. GOD WILL ULTIMATELY MAKE HIS WISDOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS CLEAR TO MEN. It is possible that the elders of Israel did not immediately acquiesce in the first necessity for this severe course. They did not know the full extent of Israel's sin. Ignorance is often the root of discord. But God would spare a few—most probably the best—of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. These should in due time be conveyed to Tel-Abib, and join the older members of the Captivity. But so base and intolerable will the characters of this remnant appear, that the elders themselves will confess that God's judgments were not a whit too severe—that a less chastisement would be inadequate. This act of God exhibits the graciousness of his character. He deigns to explain and to justify his ways unto his trustful children. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." He takes them into his fullest confidence.—D.

Vers. 1—11.—*Hypocritical inquirers of God.* "Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me," etc. In the former chapter false prophets and prophetesses were severely rebuked by the Lord God through his true prophet. In this one certain elders who came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord through him, while their hearts were given up to idols, are reproved, exhorted, and warned. The paragraph before us presents the following connected topics for consideration, which we will notice in the order in which they are presented by the prophet.

I. MEN HYPOCRITICALLY INQUIRING OF THE LORD GOD. "Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying," etc. (vers. 1—3). These elders who came to inquire of God through his prophet were probably of the number of his fellow-exiles. They came to consult the prophet of Jehovah, yet they were idolaters at heart. They had "set up their idols in their heart," etc. (ver. 3). Their idolatry involved practical atheism. Genuine belief in the existence of the Lord Jehovah would have effectually precluded idolatry. Men of such character could not sincerely inquire of God. There can be no real approach unto him without faith in the reality of his being. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is," etc. (Heb. xi. 7). Their seeking information or counsel of the Lord was not true; they were not whole-hearted in so doing, but hypocritical. They are, says Hengstenberg, the "representatives of those who only outwardly fear God, but inwardly serve the spirit of the world and the age." How many meet in God's house, unite in his worship, and listen to the ministry of his holy Word, as though they were genuine inquirers of his will, who yet have idols in their hearts! Seeming to sincerely "inquire in his temple," yet they are devoted to the pursuit of rank or riches, power or pleasure, etc.

II. HYPOCRITICAL INQUIRERS OF GOD ANSWERED ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN HEART. "Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart," etc. (vers. 4, 5). Different interpretations are given of these two verses. Thus Hengstenberg: "The question in ver. 4" (he places a note of interrogation at the end of that verse; so also does Schröder) "is in the sense of a negative, 'I will not answer;' and this negative has its ground in ver. 5. God leaves sinners without answer or help, that they may come to a knowledge of their sin. 'To take in the heart' (ver. 5) is to touch the conscience." Another interpretation is that he would give them an answer as delusive as the idols which they had taken into their hearts. The case presents itself to us thus: The spiritual state of these elders prevented them from truly hearing the word of the Lord. They were not sincere in their inquiries of him. They would not receive the truth which his servants Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaimed. Nay, more, in their then moral condition they could not receive the truth of God. With their hearts devoted to idols, how could they apprehend and hold fast the pure words of the Lord? So he would send them a message answerable to their own character. These "idolatrous oracle-seekers have to expect what corresponds to their state." Hence their own hearts were their seducers. God deals with men according to their character. "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful," etc. (Ps. xviii. 25, 26). "The sin and shame, the pain and ruin, of sinners are all from themselves, and their own hearts are the snares in which they are taken; they seduce them, they betray them; their own consciences witness against them, condemn them, and are a terror to them. If God take them, if he discover them, if he convict them, if he bind them over to his judgment, it is all by 'their own heart.' 'O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself.' The house of Israel is ruined by its own hands, 'because they are all estranged from me through their idols'" (Matthew Henry).

III. HYPOCRITICAL INQUIRERS OF GOD EXHORTED TO COMPLY WITH THE CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTABLE APPROACH UNTO HIM. "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations." Here is a true message from God for them if they will accept it. Repentance towards God was their present and imperative duty. From the Lord the house of Israel had grievously departed, and their true repentance would be a returning to him, and renunciation of their abominable idolatries. Repentance is not mere regret, or self-reproach, or sorrow, or tears. It is that grief for sin which leads to reformation of life. "Repentance," says Shakespeare, "is heart's sorrow, and a clear life ensuing." Now, this was necessary as a condition of approaching God acceptably. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. lxvi. 18). Men should "pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. ii. 8). "Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith," etc. (Heb. x. 22). When men inquire of God in this spirit, he will grant unto them gracious answers.

IV. HYPOCRITICAL INQUIRERS OF GOD WARNED OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF PERSISTENCE IN SIN. "For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me," etc. (vers. 7—11). Here they are solemnly warned that, if they would not turn from sin unto God: 1. *They should encounter the Divine displeasure.* "I will set my face against that man," etc. (ver. 8). God cannot look upon sin with indifference. He hates it. And if sinners persist in it, he will set his face against them, and visit them because of their transgressions. He did this in the case of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Siege and famine, pestilence, slaughter, and captivity were the consequences of their aggravated and long-continued sins and crimes. 2. *They should become the victims of their chosen delusions.* "If the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet," etc. (vers. 9, 10). They had chosen idols for their gods; they believed the false prophets rather than the true ones; and if they persisted in their choice they must take the consequences thereof. This was God's answer to their inquiries. He had shown them that by true repentance they would put themselves into right relations with him. But if they would not repent, he would no more speak to them by his prophets, but by his judgments in the just consequences of their sins. Their chosen prophets would be deceived, and would deceive those who inquired of them, and both the prophets and the inquirers should "bear the punishment of their iniquity." But in what sense can the Lord be said to deceive the false prophet, and then to punish him? It is certain that he cannot sin, and that he is not the author of sin. "The deception proceeds originally from indwelling sin (Jas. i. 14), otherwise it could not be the object of punishment." But it was both permitted and regulated by God. He controls both sin and the consequences thereof for the accomplishment of his own glorious purposes (cf. Ps. lxxvi. 10). When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, he did so of his own accord, with no thought of doing the will of the Lord Jehovah, yet unconsciously he was doing that will; and frequently the Lord says that he would do those things which the army of the Chaldean monarch did (cf. ch. iv. 16; v. 8—17). God employed the Chaldeans, and regulated and controlled their movements, for the working out of his own plans; yet they were free in those movements, and had no idea that in them they were the agents of the Lord God of Israel. So these false prophets were used by him in the way of judgment, and were controlled by him; but they acted voluntarily in the course which they pursued, and they who consulted them did so of their own will; and both of them should become the victims of their cherished delusions, and "bear the punishment of their iniquity." 3. *They should become the means, under God, of leading his people to fidelity unto him.* "That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me," etc. (ver. 11). This was the Divine design in the punishment of the sinful people. "'God punishes sins by means of sins,' but the end is the re-establishment of righteousness. His people, purified by trials, will cleave to him whom they have forsaken, and become a converted, sanctified people, joined unto their God by a covenant which they will not break" ('Speaker's Commentary'). The judgments of God aim at the promotion of the well-being of man.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Here is solemn warning against insincere approach unto God.* 2. *Here is encouragement to approach God sincerely and humbly.* (Vers. 6, 11.)—W. J.

Ver. 20.—*The privilege and power of the godly, their nature and limitation.* "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God," etc. Three very distinguished men are here mentioned, two of whom had long passed away from this world and all its scenes, the other was yet amongst men upon earth. Yet Noah and Job are spoken of as still in being. Absent from this world, they were yet living and present in the great universe of God. These undesigned testimonies to man's immortality, to be met with frequently in the Scriptures, afford the basis for a strong argument in support of that fact.

"The dead are like the stars by day,
  Withdrawn from mortal eye;
But not extinct, they hold their way
  In glory through the sky.
Spirits from bondage thus set free
  Vanish amidst immensity,
Where human thought, like human sight,
  Fails to pursue their trackless flight."

Daniel at this time, like Ezekiel, was an exile in Babylon, and was eminent both for his piety and his position. Noah, Daniel, and Job were all good men and great men; they are enrolled amongst the most illustrious of our race. The prophet in this paragraph predicts "four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence," by reason of their idolatry and other sins.[1] And in the text he declares that, when the hour of judgment arrives, even the presence of such men as Noah, Daniel, and Job in the doomed city would not avail to save any but their own souls.

[1] Most of these judgments we have noticed in our survey of earlier chapters of this book.

I. **The privileges of good men.** Our text announces the safety of good men even in the extremest dangers and the most irresistible judgments. "They shall . . . deliver their own souls by their righteousness." History affords remarkable examples of the deliverance of the good in times of sore peril (cf. Gen. vii. 23; xviii. 32; xix. 15—25). But it is not often that the godly are exempted from the calamities and judgments which befall the wicked. Thus Daniel, Ezekiel, and other holy men were carried into Chaldea with those to whom the exile was the punishment of idolatry, and were now suffering that exile with them. But invariably "they deliver their own souls by their righteousness." "If their bodies be not delivered, yet their souls are." Amid the overthrow of cities, the ruin of countries, or even the wreck of the world, their spiritual interests are secure. Moreover, though they are not exempt from general calamities, yet to them the calamities wear a different aspect from that which they present to the wicked. They are sustained under them, and enabled to bear them with heroic patience. The suffering which comes to the wicked as the judgment of a stern Ruler comes to the righteous as the chastisement of a loving Father. And, by his grace, out of the scars of suffering, God will evolve the beauties of holiness. The darkness and anguish which embitter and harden the heart of the wicked will increase the trust and tenderness and refine the graces of the righteous.

II. **The power of good men.** Our text implies that Noah, Daniel, and Job had power to do much for their fellow-men; that they could do much in averting destruction and saving man. The warning that these three saints would not be able to screen them from this judgment implies the belief on the part of the people of Jerusalem that the good men amongst them, by their lives and prayers, would turn aside the threatening storm. If any can turn away the judgments of Heaven from a nation of evil-doers, good men can do it. God may spare the wicked because of the righteous. The power of good men to avert Divine wrath from a people has at least two branches. 1. *The power of moral influence with men.* They are "the salt of the earth." Were it not for their influence society would become hopelessly corrupt, and the storm of God's judgment would sweep the guilty race from the earth. 2. *The power of intercession with God.* We have illustrious examples of this (cf. Gen. xviii. 23—32; Exod. xxxii. 11—14, 30—34; Numb. xi. 1—3; xiv. 13—20; xvi. 44—50). Who can estimate the power of the intercession of good men?

III. **The limitation of the power of good men.** "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter." "When the sin of a people has come to its height, and the decree has gone forth for their ruin, the piety and prayers of the best men shall not prevail to finish the controversy. This is here asserted again and again, that, though these three men were in Jerusalem at this time, yet they should deliver neither son nor daughter, not so much as the little ones should be spared for their sakes." This shows how dark and terrible the guilt of the inhabitants of Jerusalem must have been (cf. Jer. xv. 1; vii. 16; xi. 14). When the forbearance of God is exhausted, any number of the holiest of men cannot ward off the stroke of doom. Character may become so utterly depraved that reformation is impossible, and then nothing but judgment remains. Moral disease may become so deeply rooted and strong that no influence can overcome it, no power eradicate it, and then destruction is inevitable. When the Divine means of reformation have all been tried, and all have failed, what remains but utter ruin? "Abused patience will turn at last into inexorable wrath."

Conclusion. 1. *Our subject speaks earnestly to parents concerning the salvation of their children.* If you would save your children you must begin to work early and wisely. While the chains of evil habits are unforged, and the heart is susceptible of sacred impressions, and the conscience sensitive, and the sympathies tender, we must seek the salvation of our children if we would secure it. Oh, the time may come when the holiest of men "shall deliver neither son nor daughter" from the storms of God's judgment! 2. *Our text reminds us all that salvation is a personal concern.* Our kinsfolk and friends may be pious in life and powerful in prayer; but their piety will not avail for them and for us. No man possesses superfluous grace. Continuance in sin may lead, nay, must lead, to a moral condition in which the prayers of the most loving and sainted parents may avail nothing for their own son or daughter. You must believe on Jesus Christ for yourself, repent of your sins yourself. You must "work out your own salvation." There is no working by proxy here. "Each man shall bear his own burden." "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God." Therefore "strive to enter in by the narrow door," etc. "Give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure."—W. J.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The righteousness of God doubted and vindicated.* "Yet, behold, therein shall be left a remnant that shall be brought forth," etc. Our text, as Fairbairn points out, "is addressed to the people already in exile, who are regarded as viewing the destruction about to be executed on Jerusalem with astonishment and some degree of dissatisfaction. The prophet tells such there would certainly be a remnant—not, however, in the proper sense, as if they were themselves deserving persons, or spared for blessing for the sake of the pious among them—but a remnant still so wedded to sin, and so manifestly deserving of severe chastisement, that every one would recognize the justice of God's dealings toward them. 'Ye shall see,' to use the language of Calvin, 'the men to be so wicked, that ye shall be forced to confess the city was deserving of destruction, and the men themselves worthy of death. And instead of murmuring and fretting against God, ye shall be satisfied it could not have been otherwise ordered, their wickedness was of so desperate a nature; so that with soothed and tranquil minds, ye shall henceforth proclaim my righteousness, and cease any more to utter the complaints which now disturb your minds!'" Let us consider—

I. THE CONCERN OF THE GOOD FOR THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIS JUDGMENTS. Ezekiel foresaw that his fellow-exiles would be amazed at the sternness of the judgments of God upon Jerusalem. Those judgments would be of great severity. And amongst the exiles there were some pious persons who would be troubled with doubts as to whether the Lord had sufficient cause for what he had done there. They would be distressed with the suspicion that perhaps the visitation of God had been disproportionate in its severity—that the sins of the people had not merited such punishment. And they would be distressed with misgivings as to the righteousness of God in the matter. "So long as we do not understand that God on just grounds acts sternly, so long are our souls distressed and tormented." Somewhat thus Abraham felt respecting the doom pronounced on Sodom and Gomorrah. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We have here, as Robertson, in fragmentary but striking and suggestive notes, remarks, "a suspicion of the Divine justice: the most horrible with which the mind of man can be tempted. Dreadful to doubt one's own salvation, and feel suspended over the gulf! But a more terrible gulf when we doubt whether all is right here. 'Oh, to see the misery of this bleeding world!' Consider for a moment the misconception of those words, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' They have been used to prove the sovereignty of God. God is Judge, therefore what he does is right. He has a right, and therefore it is right. But Abraham does not say *that*. So far from acquiescing in the predestinarian feeling—it is to be, and therefore it is right; God is a sovereign, and may do what he pleases—he is precisely doubting this, whether, though God be Judge, his deeds are right, taking the moral sense of Abraham as a text, and considering it horrible if God's acts do not agree with it. It is a perilous way of speaking, 'God has a right to decree what he will; my salvation, your damnation.' It is not so the Bible speaks. It appeals to the sense of justice, 'Are not my ways equal?' etc. God never says, 'I create a thing right, therefore I do it.' God's will does not make a thing right. It is God's character which determines his will. For else, if the devil had created this world, wrong would be right, because his will, and we should have the terrible doctrine—might makes right" ('Life and Letters,' Appendix iii.). This is as applicable to the doubts and fears of the exiles as to the righteousness of God in his judgments upon Jerusalem, as to the doubts of Abraham as to the doom of the cities of the plain. This concern of godly men for the righteousness of God's dealings implies: 1. *An inward sense of righteousness.* It is a testimony to the existence and exercise and majesty of the moral sense in man. It is an outcome of the working of conscience. 2. *Deep solicitude for the honour of God.* Any doubt of his holiness, or of the rectitude of his doings, causes sore pain to his people, and it does so because the glory of his character is unspeakably dear to them.

II. The conviction of the good of the righteousness of God in his judgments. The Lord, by the prophet, assures the troubled exiles that they should know that he had not done without cause all that he had done in Jerusalem. 1. *This conviction would be wrought by the manifestation of the wickedness of the people.* "Therein shall be left a remnant that shall be carried forth, both sons and daughters: behold, they shall come forth unto you, and ye shall see their way and their doings," etc. The remnant that should be carried into captivity would make it clear, from their degradation and sin, that the judgments inflicted upon Jerusalem were deserved by the guilty inhabitants thereof. The exhibition of their wickedness would manifest the justice of God in their punishment. The pious exiles in Chaldea would perceive "that such corruption had deserved such destruction." "God's righteousness is clearly manifest in those that perish, as well as by means of those that escape." 2. *This conviction would bring peace to the good.* "Ye shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem," etc. "The comfort lies in the justification of the ways of God." Their painful doubts as to his righteousness would be destroyed. Their faith in him would be established. And faith brings peace and rest to the soul. 3. *The production of this conviction was ordered by God.* He did not chide or condemn them for their painful doubts; but promised them evidence for the invigoration and confirmation of their faith. And he so controlled events as to bring about this result. It appears from this that he is concerned (1) for the vindication of his own righteousness, and (2) for the peace of his people. Wherefore in his own time he will remove every cloud that veils the rectitude of his works and ways, and make it apparent to the whole intelligent universe that all his purposes and operations are just and true.

Conclusion. 1. *Let us cherish a strong assurance of the righteousness of God in all his designs and deeds.* 2. *If in anything his righteousness seems hidden from us, let us wait patiently for his own vindication thereof.*—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XV.

Ver. 2.—What is the vine tree, etc.? The prophet's mind had apparently been dwelling, after the close of his previous utterance, on the imagery of earlier writers, in which Israel had appeared as the vine of Jehovah (Gen. xlix. 22; Ps. lxxx. 9; Hos. x. 1; Isa. v.; Deut. xxxii. 32; Jer. ii. 21), and to which he himself refers again in ch. xix. 10. He saw how men might pervert that image to their own destruction. And he expands the parable, as our Lord does in John xv. Men might dwell, perhaps were actually dwelling, on the thought that they were branches of the true vine, and therefore could not perish. He exposes the groundlessness of that hope in tones of scornful sarcasm. If the vine did not bear fruit, or if it only brought forth wild grapes, then its special excellence was gone, and it challenged comparison with other trees only as a timber tree, and what was its worth as such? If Israel was not true to its vocation, it was poorer and weaker than the heathen nations round it. So far the general thought is clear. In dealing with details, we note that the words in italics, "or than," should disappear, and that the words should stand as in the Revised Version, *What is the vine more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest?*

Ver. 3.—Shall wood be taken thereof, etc.? As a timber tree, then, the vine was confessedly valueless. No carpenter would use it, even for the peg upon which men hang their cups, and which had become, as in Isa. xxii. 23, the symbol of political stability (comp. also Zech. x. 4). For the unfruitful vine branch there remained the doom of being cast into the fire (John xv. 6). What was its worth when it was half-burnt at either end and in the middle? What would Israel be fit for when it had been laid low by the "fire" of God's judgment? Probably the vivid picture of the charred branch points to the successive judgments which had fallen first on the ten tribes, then on Judah, and lastly on Jerusalem itself. The word "trespass" may refer either to the general guilt of the people, or to the last crowning crime of Zedekiah's rebellion. I rather incline to the latter, the noun being in the singular.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The worthless vine.* The vine represents Israel, and in its degenerate state it stands for the fallen, corrupt nation. Our Lord has taken up the image already familiar to us from Ps. lxxx. and Isa. v., as well as from this passage in Ezekiel, so that his Church, now regarded as the spiritual Israel, may be typified in the old analogies of the vine (John xv.).

I. WHEREIN THE WORTH OF THE VINE CONSISTS. "What is the vine tree more than any tree?" It is usually regarded as of supreme excellence. While fig trees grow by the wayside, vines are carefully walled in and the vineyard protected by watchmen (Isa. v. 2). Much labour is spent upon the vine in tilling the soil, cleansing and pruning the branches, and so preparing for the vintage. All this points to a special value in the vine above ordinary plants. It is not difficult to see the ground of this valuation. The vine is prized simply for its grapes. The abundance and quality of the fruit give it its sole worth. "And he looked that it should bring forth *grapes*" (Isa. v. 2). Christ values his people just according to their fruitfulness (John xv. 8).

II. HOW THE VINE MAY BE WORTHLESS. If the vine be fruitless, it can no longer sustain its proud pre-eminence. On the contrary, regarded as a *tree*, it must be taken for one of the poorest of its class. The forester can set no price upon its limp and straggling boughs. If it bears no fruit, and is therefore to be considered on its own account and not for the sake of its product, it is of less value than other trees. Regarded as timber it is worthless. Degenerate Israel was less valuable than heathen nations. The Jews were then far inferior to the Greeks and Romans at the height of their greatness. The Church of Christ, when barren of spiritual fruitfulness, is a noxious institution; political clubs, scientific societies, chambers of commerce,—these so-called secular institutions are superior to a degenerate Church. The fallen Christian is lower than the "man of the world," and of less use to society, as the fruitless vine is of less account than the forest tree.

III. WHAT IS TO BE DONE TO THE WORTHLESS VINE. It has failed in fruit-bearing; it is useless as timber; there remains only one possible use for it. Flung into the oven it may serve as firewood. Indeed, this is necessary. Similarly, the fruitless fig tree cannot be allowed to stand, occupying space, absorbing nutriment from the soil, casting shade where healthy sunshine would develop more profitable vegetable growth. "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" (Luke xiii. 7). A fruitless Church stands in the place of a useful one, and therefore it is positively injurious. There is but one good that can come of it. The very destruction of it may be a warning to others. Unfaithful souls are preparing for themselves a fate of destruction. Negative fruitlessness is enough to doom them (Matt. xxv. 30).

IV. HOW THE WORTHLESS VINE IS TO BE SUBSEQUENTLY REGARDED. It was of no use before it was burnt. What, then, will be its value afterwards (see ver. 5)? Chastisement, which corresponds to pruning, is sent in order to improve its subject. But destruction cannot benefit the thing destroyed. If "the wages of sin is death," such wages cannot be turned to any good account. We may submit to wholesome correction, but we should "flee from the wrath to come" when that wrath is the consuming fire of destruction, the awful consequences of persistent sin.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—8.—*The worthless vineyard.* The prophet was inspired to point the reproach of the Hebrew people, by reference to their ingratitude, their unfaithfulness, and their failure to fulfil the special purpose for which they were exalted to a position of peculiar privilege. In this passage, as in a similar passage in the fifth chapter of Isaiah's prophecies, the similitude of the vine is employed to set forth, on the one hand, Divine care, culture, and forbearance; and, on the other hand, national barrenness and uselessness. Plain truths are uttered which serve to justify before every rightly judging mind the action of the Lord in this time of Israel's calamities and distresses.

I. ISRAEL WAS SELECTED FROM AMONG THE NATIONS ON ACCOUNT OF NO EXCELLENCE OR

MERIT OF HER OWN. So far as its wood is concerned, the vine has no advantage above other trees; in fact, it "is meet for no work," and compares unfavourably with other and serviceable timber. Similarly, although in the progenitors of the Hebrew race there were remarkable gifts and remarkable moral qualities, and although in the course of Jewish history many great men arose, still it is not to be denied that the nation, as such, was a rebellious, disobedient, stiff-necked people. God had a purpose in selecting Israel, but his selection was one to prove his independence of human agencies and instrumentalities. The people were wont to boast of their ancestors, but in themselves there was nothing of which to boast.

II. THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN SELECTING ISRAEL WAS THE PRODUCTION OF PRECIOUS AND ACCEPTABLE FRUIT. If the wood of the vine is of little use, its fruit is wholesome and delicious, and the juice of the grape, though too often, like other gifts of God, abused, "maketh glad the heart of man." But if the vine yields no clusters of grapes, what is its use? Israel was appointed to privilege in order that the Law given might be reverently obeyed, in order that Jehovah, revealed in temple-worship, might be purely and devoutly worshipped. God looked that his vine should bring forth fruit, valuable, wholesome, and acceptable to himself.

III. ISRAEL FAILED TO FULFIL THIS PURPOSE. God came, year after year, seeking fruit, but found none. He looked for progress, and there was deterioration. He looked for obedience, and there was rebellion. He looked for spirituality, and there was formality and hypocrisy. He looked for sincere and cordial worship, and there was idolatry. Opportunities of devotion and of service were neglected and abused. Temptations, instead of being resisted, were succumbed to. The long-suffering of God led not to repentance.

IV. ISRAEL THUS BECAME UTTERLY USELESS FOR ANY PROFITABLE AND DIVINE END. It was this which especially oppressed the mind of the prophet; it was this which aroused the displeasure of the great Lord and Judge. "They have committed a trespass" was the complaint and reproach of Jehovah against his people. Because they were barren, they were unprofitable.

V. DIVINE DISSATISFACTION WAS EXPRESSED AGAINST ISRAEL. There is something truly terrible in the declaration of Jehovah: "I will set my face against them." Such expressions are objected against by some who are indignant at such anthropomorphic representations of the Eternal. But the acts of God, as recorded in history, support the representations of his feelings as thus expressed. Removing, as we should do, from our conceptions of Jehovah anything suggested by such language which is derogatory to his perfect character, we have still a view of the Divine justice and retributive government which it is most important that every reader of Scripture should take, and that habitually.

VI. DIVINE CHASTISEMENT IS APPARENT IN NATIONAL DISASTER. The worthless wood of the unfruitful vine was cast into the fire for fuel. And of the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Judge declared, "They shall go out from one fire, and another fire shall devour them." The history of the nation informs us how exactly such predictions were fulfilled. The calamities which came in rapid succession upon Israel and Judah were as repeated castings into the furnace of righteous retribution. The rebellious and idolatrous people were chastened, were humiliated, were decimated, exiled, despised, and all but consumed. Their land was made desolate, and their national life seemed all but extinguished. But a remnant was spared. The fires through which they passed purified, but were not suffered to consume them. In the midst of wrath God remembered mercy. There was a witness for Israel to bear, and a work for Israel to do, among the nations; and he who first chose the nation did not now abandon it.—T.

Vers. 1—8.—*Useless, if fruitless.* The nation of the Hebrews is often represented under the image of a vine. *This,* with the olive, was its staple production. It may be that ever since the visit of the spies, who brought back the gigantic cluster of grapes from Eshcol, the vine had served as a standing emblem of the empire. In the Psalms of David, and in the poetical utterances of Isaiah, frequent mention is made of Israel under the symbol of a vine. And amid the ruins of ancient buildings in Palestine, clusters of the vine, carved in stone upon lintel or architrave, may still be seen.

I. MOST TREES SERVE MANY USES. From root to topmost twig, every part of some trees is serviceable to man. The bark is used for cordage or for tanning. The root is often a valuable medicine. The juice which exudes is a precious gum. The fruit is wholesome food. And when cut down, the wood is devoted to house-building or forms implements of husbandry. Which fact is a parable. For some nations serve many good purposes. A nation may produce a superior literature which shall serve for the education of other lands. It may bring to perfection the decorative arts—painting and architecture and sculpture. It may invent a useful system of jurisprudence. It may be famous for legislation, for commerce, for manufactures. If it should fail in one respect, it might yet excel in others. Egypt and Greece and Rome were justly celebrated for many of these things. These taught the world; they moulded humanity. By their literature and art and systems of government they are teaching mankind still. "Being dead, they yet speak."

II. THE VINE TREE HAS BUT ONE USE—ITS FRUIT. Of all trees it is the most prolific in bearing fruit. Under proper culture, its fruitfulness is certain, regular, copious. All the life and vigour of the tree are poured into its clusters. But failing *this*, it renders no other service to man. Its cells are not stored with any known medicinal qualities. Its wood is too brittle to bear any strain or burden. Hence, unless fruitful, it is worthless. In this respect the vine is an apt figure of the Hebrew nation. It was raised up by God for a single purpose, viz. to exhibit to the world righteousness, loyalty to the will of the invisible God. Israel's message was to be addressed to the conscience of mankind. Israel was designed to be a lighthouse, to diffuse on every side the rays of moral and spiritual truth. If it failed in *this*, it failed altogether. It may as well *not* have been. For Israel to fail in exerting a moral influence upon the Gentile nations was a loss incalculable to humanity. It was a check upon the development of manhood.

III. A FRUITLESS VINE IS DESTINED FOR THE FLAME. Other trees, when felled, are yet valuable to man. They exude a fragrance. They possess qualities suited for dyeing or tanning. They are useful for edifices of all kinds. They afford timber for shipbuilding. But the vine has no such virtues. If fruitless, it is cut down and set apart for fuel. So was it with Israel's nationality. The picture sketched by the prophet is impressive. It is that of a vine branch severed from the tree and already burnt at both ends. The final doom of such a branch had already begun. Israel had committed a grievous trespass. The nation created to be a witness for God had become a witness against him. The medicine had become a poison. Hence the dunghill was its fittest place. The doom of Israel had already begun. Its glory was in part consumed. Fire should succeed to fire, calamity to calamity, until the lowest degradation should be reached. The decree of God is written in steel, and cannot in the nature of things be revoked. "My word shall not return unto me void."—D.

Vers. 1—8.—*The true object of the life of man.* "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, What is the vine tree more than any tree?" etc. Israel is here compared to a vine. The figure is frequently applied to her (cf. Ps. lxxx. 8—16; Isa. v. 1—7). If a vine be fruitful, it is very highly valued. Its fruit is said to make "glad the heart of man," and to "cheer God and man." But if it be not fruitful, of what use is it? It is of no use as timber. If other trees fail to bring forth fruit, they may at least render good service as timber. Not so the vine. If it is not fruitful, it is fit only for burning. So Israel was "planted a noble vine, wholly a right seed," with the express purpose of bringing forth fruit, *i.e.* of continuing faithful to the one true God, and doing righteously amongst men. If they had fulfilled that design, they would have occupied a position of noble pre-eminence amongst the nations of the world. But failing in that, they failed totally, and were fit only for destruction. "In respect of those things which constitute the natural greatness of kingdoms—antiquity of origin, extent of territory, abundance of resources, attainments in arts and science—what could they boast of in comparison of Egypt, Ethiopia, Babylon, and the greater kingdoms of the earth?" Hence if they failed religiously, like a fruitless vine they were fit only for the fire. Their destruction was already in a great measure accomplished (vers. 4, 5), and its further accomplishment was at hand (vers. 6—8). The principles involved here apply to all men and to every man. We are designed and created by God to produce the fruits of holiness and usefulness. If we do so, we honour him, occupy an exalted moral position, and benefit society. If we fail to do so, we dishonour God, sink in moral character and condition, and are worthless or injurious to society. What is the fruit which God designs that we should bear? Personal holiness and social usefulness. "Ye have your fruit unto holiness." "Bearing fruit in every good work." These are the two great characteristics of the fruit which God requires of us. They should not be severed. The holy character must bring forth good works. The good works must ever be connected with, and the expression of, a holy character. This fruit will be produced in various degrees and in various forms, according to personal idiosyncrasies, abilities, and opportunities. God does not require that Christian character shall be rigidly uniform, or that Christian service shall all be of the same kind. What he demands is that every one shall be faithful in the pursuit of holiness and usefulness, and shall endeavour to realize these things in the best manner in each individual case. Our text further suggests—

I. THAT THE TRUE OBJECT OF MAN'S LIFE IS THAT HE MAY THUS BEAR FRUIT. 1. *He is formed by God for this object.* Man is endowed with faculties fitting him for this. He has mind and soul by which he may perceive the revelation of God. He has a will which was designed to work in sweet harmony with that of God. He has a conscience which was constituted to accord with and respond to the eternal righteousness of God. He has affections and aspirations which find their true object in God, and their highest exercise in his worship. Moreover, he has powers for expressing all these things in his life; for feeling and speaking and acting holily, and so honouring God by producing the fruit which he requires of us. We are also fitted by God for usefulness in various ways. We have the power of sympathy, of kind and earnest speech, of loving brotherly help, of tender and trusty support, by which to be useful to each other. There is no one but may help another in some form and to some extent. 2. *Man is blessed by God with culturing agencies for this object.* What agencies of help and culture God gave to his people Israel!—the moral Law, religious ordinances, sacred memorials, consecrated priests, inspired prophets. How many and influential are the means which we possess for promoting our mental and spiritual growth and usefulness!—an inspiring history, a glorious literature, the sacred Scriptures, opportunities of religious worship, divinely instituted sacraments, various Christian ministries, the influences of the Holy Spirit. Even the very trials under which we smart and bleed are but the prunings of the great Vine-dresser, that we may bear more fruit. What does such a constitution as ours mean? What do all these agencies mean? What is their mission? That we may bring forth fruit, even holiness and usefulness.

> "Heaven doth with us, as we with torches do;
> Not light them for themselves: for if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch'd,
> But to fine issues: nor nature never lends
> The smallest scruple of her excellence,
> But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
> Herself the glory of a creditor,
> Both thanks and use."
>
> (Shakespeare, 'Measure for Measure,' act i. sc. 1.)

II. THIS IS THE ONLY TRUE OBJECT OF MAN'S LIFE. If the vine tree does not produce grapes, it fails of the one object of its existence, and is worthless. If man does not produce the fruit of excellence in himself and serviceableness to others, he misses the end of his being. Other objects for which men live are unsatisfactory. The pursuit of pleasure, the race for riches, the struggle for power, the toil for knowledge, or the possession of any of these things or all of them, cannot be the chief object of human life. I assign only one reason in proof of this assertion, but that is a sufficient one, viz. because they secure only a partial development of our nature. God has endowed us with no superfluous powers. He would have us exercise and develop every faculty of our being. He is ever opposed to waste. But any one of the objects mentioned, or all of them combined, involve the neglect of certain great faculties of our being, the wasting of important powers. He whose supreme aim is the attainment of pleasure generally develops only his sensuous tastes and appetites, to the grave neglect or injury of his mental and moral powers. He who lives for riches develops his acquisitive faculties, to the detriment of his communicative powers; he grows in commercial sagacity and keenness, to the great risk of his tenderness, uprightness, and reverence; he becomes rich in his purse, but poor in his soul. He whose great object is to obtain power, if he pursue it wisely will develop several faculties of his nature; *e.g.* his powers of observation and analysis, of self-control and control of others; he will acquire knowledge of men and of times; but he is likely to lose conscience, to become unscrupulous, overbearing, tyrannical. And he whose chief purpose is to acquire knowledge will develop his mental faculties, become more clear in intellectual perception, more comprehensive in mental grasp; but he will lose sensitiveness and strength of sympathy, tenderness of feeling, reverence of spirit. We see, then, that, taken singly, these things are not satisfactory as the chief object of human life. But supposing one could combine all four—knowledge, power, riches, pleasure—as his object in life, and attain them, what then? Still he has not the true object of life, and for the reason already assigned; for in all (1) the acquisitive faculties are developed at the expense of the communicative; (2) man's relationship to God is ignored; (3) man's highest nature is neglected. Tenderness, sympathy, adoration, service, are overlooked. Turn now to the object suggested by our text—holiness of heart and life, and usefulness of influence and action. (1) It affords scope for the harmonious development of every faculty of our nature. (2) That development is beneficial, not only to the individual, but to society also. This, indeed, is part of the object or purpose itself. (3) That development is acceptable to God. It includes reverent worship of him, loyal obedience to his will, etc. Hence we conclude that this, and this alone, is the true object of the life of man.

III. If a man's life utterly fail of this object, it is fit only for destruction. Of what use is a hopelessly fruitless vine? "What is the vine tree more than any tree, the vine branch which is among the trees of the forest? Shall wood be taken thereof to make any work?" etc. If the vine does not produce fruit, it is not fit for timber; it is fit only for fuel. The Jews at this time had signally and completely failed as to the end of their existence as a nation, and they were doomed to national destruction. So with the life of men. If we do not answer God's design we are doing harm rather than good, our life is a bane instead of a blessing; and if there be no hope of thorough change in this respect, we are fit only for destruction. Of the fruitless vineyard the Lord saith, "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." "The axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." "He said unto the vine-dresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why doth it also cumber the ground?" Persistent fruitlessness means ruin, destruction.

Application. Have we our fruit unto holiness? Are we bearing fruit in good works? Then let us seek after increased fruitfulness. But if it be otherwise with us, let us penitently seek to amend our ways, lest our barrenness leads to our ruin.—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVI.

The section on which we now enter, with its companion picture in ch. xxiii., forms the most terrible, one might almost say the most repellent, part of Ezekiel's prophetic utterances. We have, as it were, his story of the harlot's progress, his biography of the Messalina of the nations. We shudder as we read it, just as we shudder in reading the sixth satire of Juvenal. The prophet speaks, like the satirist, of things which we have learnt, mainly under the teaching of Christian purity, to veil in a reticent reserve, with a Lucretian and Dante-like vividness. The nearest parallel, indeed, which literature presents to it is found in the 'Epistola ad Florentinos' of the latter poet. We need to remember, as we read it, that his standard was not ours, that those for whom he wrote had done or witnessed the things which he describes, that there was in them no nerve of pudicity to shock. He did not write *virginibus puerisque*, but for men to whom the whole imagery was a familiar thing. It is obvious, however, that the interpreter lives under other conditions than the prophet, and cannot always follow him in the minuteness of his descriptions.

The thought that underlies Ezekiel's parable, that Israel was the bride of Jehovah, and that her sin was that of the adulterous wife, was sufficiently familiar. Isaiah (i. 21) had spoken of the "faithful city that had become a harlot." Jeremiah (ii. 2) had represented Jehovah as remembering "the kindness of her youth, the love of her espousals." What is characteristic of Ezekiel's treatment of that image is that he does not recognize any period in which Israel had been as a faithful wife. But even here he had a forerunner in Hosea, who, in order that his own life might be itself a parable, was ordered to take to himself "a wife of whoredom," one, *i.e.*, whose character was tainted before her marriage (Hos. i. 2). Ezekiel would seem to have dwelt upon that thought, and to have expanded it into the terrible history that follows.

Ver. 3.—Thy birth and thy nativity, etc. A prosaic literalism (as *e.g.* in interpreters like Hitzig and Kliefert) has seen in Ezekiel's language the assertion of an ethnological fact. "The Jebusite city," the prophet is supposed to say, "was never really of pure Israelite descent. Its people are descended from Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, and are tainted, as by a law of *hereditè*, with the vices of their forefathers." So taken, the passage would remind us of the scorn with which Dante (*ut supra*) speaks of the cruel and base herd of Fiesole, who corrupted the once noble stock of the inhabitants of Florence (so also 'Inf.,' xv. 62). Rightly understood, it is believed that Ezekiel's words imply the very opposite of this. As Isaiah (i. 10) had spoken of "the rulers of Sodom, and the people of Gomorrah;" as Deut. xxxii. 32 had spoken of the vine of Israel becoming as "the vine of Sodom;" as our Lord speaks of the Jews of his time as not being "the children of Abraham" (John viii. 39); so Ezekiel, using the strongest form of Eastern vituperation, taunts the people of Jerusalem with acting as if they were descended, not from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but from the earlier heathen inhabitants of what was afterwards the land of Israel. It is not necessary to enter into a history of the three nations whom he names. Briefly, the Canaanites represented the dwellers in the lowland country west of the valley of the Jordan—the plains of Philistia, Sharon, Esdraelon, and Phœnicia; and their leading representatives in Ezekiel's time were the cities of Tyre and Zidon. The Amorites were people of the mountains, at first, west of the Jordan, on the heights over the Dead Sea and as far as Hebron, but afterwards, under Sihon, on the high tablelands east of the Jordan. The Hittites, on whose history much light has been thrown by recent Egyptian and other discoveries, appear first in the history of the purchase of the cave of Macphelah, at Kirjath-arba, or Hebron, and that history implies commerce and culture. Esau's marriage with the daughters of two Hittite chiefs implies, perhaps, a recognition of their value as allies (Gen. xxvi. 34). They are always numbered with the other six nations, whom the Israelites were to conquer or expel (generally in conjunction with the Canaanites and Amorites as the three first, though not always in the same order, Exod. iii. 8; xiii. 5; xxxiii. 2; xxxiv. 11). And this fact obviously determined Ezekiel's choice. In the later historical books they appear but seldom. One Hittite captain, Uriah, occupies a high position in David's army (2 Sam. xi. 3). The kings of the Hittites trade with Solomon, and give their daughters to him in marriage (1 Kings x. 29). They meet us for the last time as possible allies of the kings of Judah (2 Kings vii. 6), and in the list of the older nations in Ezra ix. 1 and Neh. ix. 8. Then they disappear from the page of history till the discovery and decipherment of Egyptian records in our own time shows them to have been among the mighty nations that have passed with their rulers into the Hades of departed kingdoms.

Ver. 4.—As for thy nativity, etc. We ask, as we interpret the parable, of what period in the history of Israel Ezekiel speaks. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are ignored by him, and he starts from a time of misery and shame. It is obvious that the only period which corresponds to this is that of the sojourn of Israel as an oppressed and degraded people in the land of Goshen. He paints, with a Dantesque minuteness, the picture of a child just born, abandoned by its mother and neglected by all others from the very moment of its birth. It lies unwashed and foul to look upon. No woman's care does for it the commonest offices of motherhood. **For to supple,** read, with the Revised Version, *to cleanse.* The practice still met with in the East of rubbing the new-born child with salt may have rested partly on sanitary grounds (Jerome, *in loc.*; Galen, 'De San.,' i. 7), partly on its symbolic meaning (Numb. xviii. 19). When this was done, the child was wrapt in swaddling-clothes (Luke ii. 7), but these too were wanting in the picture which Ezekiel draws. The whole scene may have been painted from the life. Such a birth may well have been witnessed during the march of the exiles, when the brutality of their Chaldean drivers allowed no halt, and the child was left to perish of neglect, and the thought may then have flashed across Ezekiel's mind that the pity which he felt for the deserted infant was a faint shadow of that which Jehovah had felt for Israel in the degradation of their heathen bondage.

Ver. 5.—For **to the loathing of thy person**, read, with the Revised Version, *for that thy person was abhorred.*

Ver. 6.—For **polluted**, read, with the Revised Version, *weltering*, the primary meaning of the verb being that of stamping or treading, and omit "when thou wast," as weakening the condensed force of the original. The marvel of that unlooked-for pity is emphasized by the iteration of the word of mercy, **Live.** The commentary of the Chaldee Targum is sufficiently curious to be quoted: "And the memory of my covenant with your fathers came into my mind, and I was revealed that I might redeem you, because it was manifest to me that ye were afflicted in your bondage, and I said unto you, 'I will have compassion on you in the blood of circumcision,' and I said unto you, 'I will redeem you by the blood of the Passover'" (Rosenmüller). The thought underlying this strange interpretation is that blood might be the means of life as well as of pollution, and in that thought there is a significance at once poetical and profound, almost, as it were, anticipating the later thoughts that the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin (1 John i. 7; Rev. i. 5), that we make our robes white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. vii. 14). There is no reason, however, for believing that such thoughts were present to the prophet's mind.

Ver. 7.—The tenses should be in the simple historic past: I caused; thou didst increase and wax great; thou attainedst, and so on (Revised Version). In the word "multiply" (Exod. i. 7) the figure passes into historical reality. **To excellent ornaments**; Hebrew, *to ornament of ornaments.* The word is commonly used of jewels, trinkets, and the like (Exod. xxxiii. 4; 2 Sam. i. 24; Isa. xlix. 18). So Vulgate, *mundus muliebris.* Here, however, the external adorning comes in vers. 10, 11, and instead of the plural we have the dual. Hitzig is, perhaps, right in taking the phrase to refer to the beauty of the cheeks, which are themselves the ornaments of the golden prime of youth. The LXX., following either a different reading or paraphrasing, gives, "to cities of cities." The two clauses that follow point to the most obvious signs of female puberty. For **whereas**, read, with the Revised Version, *yet*, etc., as describing, not as the Authorized Version seems to do, a state which had passed away, but one which still continued even when full-grown girlhood would have demanded clothing.

Ver. 8.—The words point to the time of the love of the espousals of Jer. ii. 2, interpreting the parable, when Israel had grown to the maturity of a nation's life, and gave promise, in spite of previous degradation, of capacities that would render it worthy of the love of the Divine Bridegroom. **I spread my skirt over thee.** Garments were often used as coverlets, and the act described was therefore, as in Ruth iii. 9, the received symbol of a completed marriage (comp. Deut. xxii. 30; xxvii. 20). The historical fact represented by the symbol here was probably the formal covenant between Jehovah and Israel (Exod. xxiv. 6, 7). It was then that he became her God, and that she became his people.

Ver. 9.—The "washing" and "anointing" were part of the customary preparations for the marriage union (Ruth iii. 3; Esth. ii. 12; Judith x. 3). The mention of blood receives its explanation, not in the facts of ver. 6, but in the ceremonial rules of Lev. xv. 19—24.

Ver. 10.—**Broidered work**; the "raiment of needlework" of Ps. xlv. 14; Judg. v. 30; Exod., xxxv. 35; xxxviii. 23. The word meets us again in ch. xxvii. 24, as among the imports of Tyre from Egypt. Curiously enough, the Hebrew verb (*râkam*) has passed through Arabic into the languages of Western Europe, and we have the Italian *ricamare*, the Spanish *recamare*, the French *recamer*, for "embroidering." **Badgers' skin.** Elsewhere in the Old Testament the word is found only in the Pentateuch (Exod. xxviii. 5; xxvi. 14; Numb. iv. 6, 8, 10, *et al.*). It has been commonly taken as meaning the skin of some animal—badger, dolphin, or porpoise, or, as in the Revised Version, *seal*, which was used for sandals. All the older versions, however, take it as a word of colour, the LXX. giving *ὑακίνθον* ("dark red"); Aquila, Symmachus, and Vulgate, *ianthino* ("violet"). Possibly the two meanings may coalesce, one giving the material, the other the tint which met the eye. **Fine linen.** The byssus of Egyptian manufacture (Exod. xxv 4; xxvi. 1; xxxix. 3, *et al.*). **Silk.** The Hebrew word (here and in ver. 13) does not occur elsewhere. The word so translated in Prov. xxxi. 22 is that which we find here and elsewhere for "fine linen." Silk, in the strict sense of the term, had its birthplace in China, and there is no evidence that even the commerce of Tyre extended so far; but the context points to some fine texture of the lawn or muslin kind, like the Coan vestments of the Greeks. So the LXX. gives *τριχαπτόν*, as though it were made of fine hair; the Vulgate, *subtilia*. It is significant that three out of the four articles specified are prominent (as the references show) in the description of the tabernacle and the priestly dress, in Exod. xxviii., xxxix. The dress of the bride symbolized the ritual and cultus of Judaism.

Ver. 11.—**Ornaments.** Same word as in ver. 7, but here taken in its more usual sense. (For bracelets, see ch. xxiii. 42; Gen. xxiv. 22, 30; Numb. xxxi. 50. For chain, Gen. xli. 42).

Ver. 12.—**A jewel on thy forehead;** better, with the Revised Version, *a ring upon thy nose.* The word has the same meaning in Gen. xxiv. 47 ("ear-ring" in the Authorized Version); Isa. iii. 21 (where the Authorized Version gives "nose jewels"); Prov. xi. 22. Jerome, however, notes (*in loc.*) that the Syrian women of his time wore pendants or lockets that hung from the forehead to the nostrils. The crown, or diadem (LXX., *στέφανος καυχήσεως*), the thin circlet of gold confining the hair, completed the catalogue of ornaments. The Chaldee Targum continues its spiritual interpretation: "I gave the ark of my covenant to be among you, and the cloud of my glory overshadowed you, and the angel of my presence led you in the way." And, if we assume, as we legitimately may assume, that Ezekiel, above all others, the prophet of symbolism, did not fill up his picture with details which were only meant to fill it up, this seems a not unfitting interpretation.

Ver. 13.—**Thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil.** From the dress of the bride we pass to her luxuries in the way of food. The things named might, of course, be only chosen as the delicacies for which the land of Israel was famous (Deut. xxxii. 13, 14), which in the prophet's own time were in demand in the markets of Tyre (ch. xxvii. 17). Cakes of flour and honey were in common use in various forms of Greek ritual, and are probably referred to in Jer. xliv. 19, but in that of the Jews (Lev. ii. 11) honey takes its place, side by side with leaven, as a thing forbidden. **Thou didst grow into a kingdom.** History crops out through the parable, and points to the stage which it has now reached, *i.e.* that of the magnificence of the kingdom under Solomon.

Ver. 14.—**It was perfect, etc.** (compare the phrase, "perfection of beauty," in Ps. l. 2; Lam. ii. 15, as applied to Jerusalem). The prophet, in the words, **my comeliness**—*majesty* (Revised Version)—lays stress on the fact that that "perfection" was itself the gift of God.

Ver. 15.—We enter on the history of the apostasy, and the root-evil was that the bride of Jehovah had been unfaithful to her Lord. She looked on her glory as her own, and did not recognize that everything in it was the gift of God (Hos. ii. 8). The words obviously point to the policy which Solomon had initiated, of alliances with the heathen and the consequent adoption of their worship. This, as from the earliest days of Israel, was the "whoredom" (Revised Version) of the unfaithful wife (Exod. xxxiv. 15, 16; Lev. xvii. 7; Deut. xxxi. 16; Judg. ii. 17; Isa. i. 21; Jer. ii. 20; Hos. i., ii.). And it was, so to speak, a promiscuous whoredom. Every passer-by was admitted to her embraces, every nation that offered its alliance had its worship recognized and adopted. In the closing words of extremest scorn, the prophet adds, **his it was.** Jerusalem was, as I have said, the Messalina of the nations.

Ver. 16.—(For **high places,** see note on ch. vi. 6.) The words imply that the shrines upon them were decked with hangings of many-coloured tapestry, presenting an appearance like that of a Persian carpet, as in 2 Kings xxiii. 7, of the image of the Asherah. Those hangings were, as in Prov. vii. 16, the ornaments of the adulterous bed. The "high places" are named first, as the earliest form of idolatry. **The like things shall not come.** The words are obscure, and the text probably corrupt. As they stand, they seem to say that the world would never again witness so shameful an apostasy. The Vulgate, *Sicut non est factum neque futurum est*, extends the comparison to the past. Possibly, though it is a strain upon the grammar, the words may be rendered, "such things should not come, should not be."

Ver. 17.—**Images of men, etc.;** Hebrew, as falling in with the symbolism of the history, "male images." The words point to the teraphim, the penates, or household gods, of which we read in Gen. xxxi. 19; Judg. xviii. 14; 1 Sam. xix. 13; Hos. iii. 4; and which, like the statues of Baal-peor, may have exhibited the phallic type of idolatry.

Vers. 18, 19.—**Mine oil and mine incense.** This, as afterwards in ch. xxiii. 41, was the crowning aggravation of the guilt. The very gifts of God, designed for his worship, were prostituted to that of his rivals. The "oil" is that of Exod. xxx. 23—25, perfumed and set apart for sacred uses. The act of covering the idol was, as in ver. 8, the symbol of the marriage union. In the sweet savour we have the familiar phrase of ch. vi. 13. The scene brought before us is that of a sacrificial feast, in which cakes of flour, honey, and oil were eaten whilst incense was offered. So we have the "adorea liba" of Virgil, 'Æneid,' vii. 109, or more fully in Tibullus, 'Eleg.,' i. 7, 53, 54, the "thuris honores," the "liba . . . dulcia melle." Thus it was, etc. As in ver. 16, the description seems to rouse an instinctive abhorrence in the prophet's mind, which finds utterance in this form: "Yes, it was even so." The words are, however, taken by the LXX., Vulgate, and Luther as opening the following verse: "And it came to pass that."

Ver. 20.—The next stage of idolatry is that of Moloch-worship, which never wholly ceased as long as the monarchy of Judah lasted (2 Kings xvi. 3; Ps. cvi. 37; Isa. lvii. 5; Jer. vii. 32; xix. 5; Micah vi. 7; Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 2). It will be noticed that the words, "the fire," are in italics, *i.e.* are not in the Hebrew, the verb "to pass through" having acquired so technical a meaning that it was enough without that addition. This, as the closing words indicate, was the crowning point. As though idolatry in itself was a small matter, it was intensified by infanticide.

Ver. 22.—Thou hast not remembered. The words gain a fuller significance when we recollect those of Ezekiel's master (Jer. ii. 2). The husband remembered "the love of her espousals;" the faithless wife forgot from what a life of shame and misery she had then been rescued.

Ver. 23.—Woe unto thee, etc.! The interjectional parenthesis, half-anathema and half-lamentation, looks forward rather than backward. Up to this point Ezekiel had dwelt on the forms of idolatry which were indigenous to Canaan and the nations in immediate contact with it. Now he enters on the later forms of evil which had been adopted from more distant nations. We pass from the time of Solomon to that of Ahaz and Manasseh.

Ver. 24.—An eminent place; *lofty* (Revised Version); but the word strictly points to the form of a vault, with the added meaning, as in the LXX., *οἴκημα πορνικόν*, and the Vulgate, *lupanar*, of its being used for prostitution. It is, at least, a curious fact that the Latin *fornicari* and its derivatives, take their start from the *fornices*, the vaults or cells which were the haunts of the harlots of Rome. Looking to the fact that all the worst forms of sensual evil came to Rome from the East, and specially from Syria—

> "Jampridem in Tiberim Syrus defluxit
> Orontes"
>
> (Juv., 'Sat.', iii. 62)

—it seems probable that the practice was a survival of the custom to which Ezekiel refers. As in the Mylitta-worship at Babylon (Herod., i. 262; Bar., vi. 43), and that of Aphrodite at Corinth, prostitution assumed a quasi-religious character, and the harlot sat in a small cell, or chapel, inviting the passers-by, and treating her hire as, in part, an offering to the goddess whom she served. Such chapels of prostitution were to be found naturally in the "high places" of Judah (the word, however, is not that commonly so translated), and in the crossways of intersecting roads. To such a harlot Ezekiel compares the daughter of Judah, and proceeds to paint her life with a terrible minuteness, even to the very attitude that invited to sin.

Ver. 26.—With the Egyptians. The words point to political and commercial alliances, in themselves a whoredom (Isa. xxiii. 17; Nah. iii. 4), such as Zedekiah, like some of his predecessors, had trusted in, as well as to the adoption of Egyptian worship, such as we have seen in ch. viii. 10, the one leading naturally to the other. The words, great of flesh, may point, as we interpret the parable, to the supposed strength of the stout and stalwart soldiers, the chariots and horses of the Egyptians, but possibly also may be a euphemism for the mere animal vigour which stimulated passion.

Ver. 27.—Have diminished thine ordinary food. The husband was bound to provide his wife with food and raiment (Exod. xxi. 10). Here his first discipline for the unfaithful wife is to place her on a short allowance. Jehovah, to interpret the parable, had placed Israel under the discipline of famine and other visitations that involved a loss of wealth and power. Hos. ii. 9, 10 supplies a striking parallel. The daughters of the Philistines. So in ver. 57. The phrase, like "the daughter of Zion," indicates the Philistine cities. These had been, from the days of Samuel to those of Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii. 18), among the most persistent enemies of Judah (comp. Amos i. 6; iii. 9; Joel iii. 4; Isa. ix. 12; xiv. 29). In the words, were ashamed of thy lewd way, the prophet points, as his master had done (Jer. ii. 10), to the fact that other nations had at least been faithful to their inherited religion, while Judah had forsaken hers.

Ver. 28.—With the Assyrians. Here also the words include political alliances like that of Ahaz with Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings xvi. 7), as well as the adoption of idolatrous worship. The latter probably followed under Ahaz as a consequence of the former, and afterwards spread through the influence of the Assyrian colonists—each nation with its own deities—in Samaria (2 Kings xvii. 24). The cultus of the queen of heaven

(Jer. xliv. 17), *i.e.* of the Assyrian Ishtar, may have had this origin. Yet couldest not be satisfied. One is reminded once more of Juvenal ('Sat.,' vi. 130).

Ver. 29.—In the land of Canaan, etc. The words at first seem to give the nearest and furthest points of the intercourse of Israel with foreign nations. I incline, however, with Smend and the margin of the Revised Version, to take Canaan in its secondary sense as "the land of traffick," Chaldea being in apposition with it (comp. Isa. xxiii. 8; Hos. xii. 7; Zeph. i. 11, for a like use of the Hebrew word). Chaldea thus comes in its right place as closing the list of the nations with whom the harlot-city had been unfaithful.

Ver. 30.—How weak, etc.! The weakness is that expressed in the Latin *impotens libidinis*, with no strength to resist the impulses of desire. The word imperious (perhaps *masterful* would be better) is that of one who is subject to no outward control. One is reminded of Dante on Semiramis ('Inf.,' v. 56). The strange renderings of the LXX. (*τὶ διαθῶ τὴν θυγατέρα σου*) and the Vulgate (*in quo mundabo cor tuum*) are difficult to account for, but probably indicate that the present text is corrupt.

Ver. 31.—In that, etc. It is better to take the words as beginning a fresh sentence: "when thou didst build," etc. The historical survey of the harlot's progress is brought to a close, and the prophet points with bitter scorn to what aggravated its degradation. Other nations, like Tyre and Zidon, had risen to prosperity and eminence through their intercourse with foreigners. To Judah it had brought only subjection and the payment of tribute. She had given gifts to all her lovers, instead of receiving from them the rewards of her shame. She was as the adulterous wife who forsakes her husband, and gives what belonged to him to strangers. The conduct of Ahaz in stripping the Temple of its gold and silver to pay tribute to Assyria (2 Kings xvi. 8), gives an apt illustration of what the prophet means (comp. Hos. xii. 1; Isa. xxx. 6).

Ver. 35.—From the task of painting the guilt of Judah the prophet proceeds to that of denouncing its punishment.

Ver. 36.—Thy filthiness; literally, *thy brass;* probably as alluding to the tribute referred to in the previous verses, "brass" being taken as used scornfully for money generally. Possibly, however, as in Jer. vi. 28, the word stands for the symbol of shame and vileness (compare our "brazen-faced"), and so justifies the rendering of the Authorized Version and Revised Version. **Thy nakedness discovered;** *i.e.*, interpreting the parable, the intercourse of Judah with foreign nations had simply exposed the points that were most open to attack (Gen. xlii. 9). **By the blood of thy children.** The words may refer specially to the Moloch-sacrifices of ver. 21, but may also include the lavish waste of life as well as treasure which had been the consequence of the foreign alliances. The harlot-city is indicated as being also a murderess.

Ver. 37.—I will gather all thy lovers, etc. Interpreting the parable, the "lovers" are the nations with which Judah had allied herself, and whose religion she had adopted. In that confederacy of Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, Philistines, Edomites, and Chaldeans there should be small difference between those whom she had loved and those whom she had hated. All alike would exult in her shame and her fall (comp. Ps. cxxxvii. 7; 2 Kings xxiv. 2).

Ver. 38.—The bloodshed may refer, as in ver. 36, to the Moloch-sacrifices, or may include also other crimes, assassinations and judicial murders (Jer. ii. 34). Strictly speaking, the punishment of the adulteress was death by stoning (Lev. xx. 2, 10; Deut. xxi. 21; xxii. 21; John viii. 5). Did Ezekiel think of the stones cast against the city from the catapult-engines of the Chaldeans as a literal counterpart of that punishment? In the last clause read, with the Revised Version, *I will bring upon thee the blood of fury and jealousy;* sc. the death which was inflicted by the indignation of Jehovah as the Husband against whom Judah had sinned.

Ver. 39.—(For eminent place and high place, see notes on ver. 24.) These the Chaldean conqueror treated as local sanctuaries, and laid them waste. The clothes and the jewels are, of course, all outward tokens of stateliness and prosperity. The (or a) holy city, the perfection of beauty, should be as "some forlorn and desperate castaway" (comp. Lam. i. 1—10 for a companion picture).

Ver. 40.—The punishment of stoning was, as a rule, inflicted by the "congregation" (Numb. xv. 36), or by the men of the city (Lev. xx. 2). Other forms of punishment for impurity were those of the sword and burning, as in Lev. xx. 14; xxi. 9. The thrusting through (better, *hewing;* the word is not found elsewhere) probably points to mutilation after death, as in the case of Agag (1 Sam. xv. 33; comp. Judg. xix. 29; Dan. ii. 5; iii. 29). In this case the "congregation" or "company" is the army of the Chaldeans, and each form of punishment has its counterpart in the various agencies which they employed for the punishment of the city.

Ver. 41.—They shall burn thine houses with fire, etc. (comp. 2 Kings xxv. 9 and Jer. lii. 13, for the fulfilment of the prediction).

The women stand for the "cities" which looked on, with awe or exultation, at the destruction of the guilty. Possibly, however, the words may include a literal sense, as in Lam. ii. 10.

Ver. 42.—**So will I make my fury, etc.;** read, with the Revised Version, *will satisfy*. The words are not primarily words of comfort. They speak of the satisfaction of the jealous husband's righteous anger, and therefore of a completed punishment. And yet that thought was, as the sequel shows (vers. 53, 60—63), the beginning of hope for the future, as the prophet thought of his people. For here the forms of punishment were not final. The daughter of Zion survived the stoning, the sword, and the burning. And so, when wrath had done its work of retribution, it might become corrective and purgatorial. The injured husband, in the bold anthropomorphic language of the parable, would be no more angry. The Lord God of Israel would remember his covenant, and forgive.

Ver. 43.—**Because thou hast not remembered** (comp. Jer. ii. 2). There is, so to speak, a certain dawn of tenderness in the new form of reproach, as compared with the sternness of what had gone before, and this in itself implies the pity which is the ground of hope. **Fretted.** Ezra (v. 12) uses the same word, there rendered "provoke." Had Ezekiel's use of it stamped it as the right word for confession? **Thou shalt not commit, etc.** The Vulgate follows a reading which gives, "I have not done according to thy lewdness," etc.; *i.e.* the guilt had deserved a greater punishment. The Revised Version margin gives, "Hast thou not committed," etc.? The word for "lewdness" ("lewd way" in ver. 27) is specially characteristic of Ezekiel, who uses it eleven times. Elsewhere it is translated "wickedness" (Lev. xviii. 17, *et al.*), "lewdness" in Judg. xx. 6; Jer. xiii. 27. It conveys always the sense of a guilt that revolts and shocks us.

Ver. 44.—**Every one that speaketh proverbs, etc.** As in ch. xviii. 2, we have an example of the tendency of the Eastern mind to condense the experience of life into the form of proverbial sayings. Here the proverb expresses what we call the doctrine of *hérédité*. We say, in such cases, "Like father, like son;" but the feeling of the East recognized, especially in the case of daughters, that the mother's influence was predominant.

Ver. 45.—Ezekiel returns to the thought of the spiritual parentage of Jerusalem and Judah, as in ver. 3. Reading between the lines, we find something like an anticipation of St. Paul's thought that Jehovah was the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews (Rom. iii. 29). The Hittites and Sodom and Samaria, to whom she is compared, had all alike been guilty of unfaithfulness to their husbands. Their idolatry was therefore, like hers, an act of apostasy. Jehovah was their husband also, their children were his children (ver. 21). He claimed them as his own, had entered with them also into a relation which, though less close than that with Israel, was as that of the husband to the wife. The thought expands, as we shall see, in the sequel of the chapter.

Ver. 46.—No very adequate reason appears for the assignment of the respective ages of the two sisters. Historically, Sodom, as the oldest representative of evil, would have seemed to claim precedence. Samaria may have had this position assigned to it as more closely connected with Judah. The left and right hands indicate respectively a position to the north and south of Jerusalem, the observer of the heavens looking east, as, we may note, the temple did (ch. viii. 16). The comparison with Samaria is developed more fully in ch. xxiii. The daughters are, as elsewhere, the cities dependent on Sodom and Samaria respectively.

Ver. 47.—The words in italics indicate, as usual, a difficulty. A better construction gives, *Thou hast not . . . done after a small measure only*. So the Vulgate, *Neque secundum scelera earum fecisti pauxillum minus*. The LXX. connects the words with the clause that follows: "Thou wast all but (παρὰ μικρὸν) corrupted more than they."

Vers. 49, 50.—It is noticeable that what we commonly speak of as the specific sin of the cities of the plain is not mentioned here. The prophet fixes on the point which made Sodom a luxurious and sensual city, the graver evil being just hinted at in the word abominations, and as the outcome of the evil tendencies. So in like manner the special sin of Samaria, the worship of the calves, is not named, but taken for granted. (For fulness of bread, see Prov. xxx. 9; Hos. xiii. 6; Deut. viii. 12.) Prosperity and luxury in her case, as in that of other wealthy cities, hardened the hearts of men against the poor and needy. There was probably a sufficient reason for the omission which has been pointed out. It was wiser to dwell on the sins which were common to the two cities rather than on the vice which, though it existed in Jerusalem (2 Kings xxiii. 7), was probably not prevalent there. **As I saw good;** better, *according to what I saw*. The word "good" is not in the Hebrew, and the words apparently refer to Gen. xviii. 21.

Vers. 51, 52.—**Thou hast justified, etc.** The word has a touch of sarcasm. Sodom and Samaria might claim a verdict of acquittal ("justify," in its technical sense) as compared with Judah. They had not prosented, as she had done, a confluence of all the worst idolatries. The words find something like an echo in our Lord's teaching in Matt. x. 15; xi. 24. And, as is common in such cases, "she had judged," *i.e.* had passed sentence of condemnation on those who were more righteous than herself. The Revised Version changes both meaning and punctuation: *Bear thine own shame, in that thou hast given judgment for thy sisters; through thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they, they are more righteous than thou*; but the Authorized Version seems preferable. It may be questioned whether the word for judged is ever used of an acquittal. The point of the sentence is that Judah condemned those who were less guilty than herself (comp. Rom. ii. 17—23).

Ver. 53.—**When I shall bring again;** better, with the Revised Version, both here and in ver. 55, *and I will turn again*. The Authorized Version reads like a sentence of hopeless and perpetual condemnation, as *per impossibile*. When Sodom and Samaria should be pardoned, then, and not till then, should there be hope for Judah. But all that follows in the chapter shows that what is meant is a promise of restoration, not for Judah only, but also for her less-guilty sisters. Ezekiel sees a far-off hope for his own nation, and he cannot limit the mercy of God in bringing them also, as she was to be brought, to repentance. For them also punishment was a means to an end beyond itself, corrective, and not merely retributive. The language of Isaiah (xix. 23—25) as to Egypt and Assyria presents a striking parallel, and may have been in Ezekiel's thoughts.

Ver. 54.—Even in that restoration, however, there should be a further element of humiliation. Judah should be a comfort (see ch. xiv. 22) to those who should see her placed lower than themselves, content, at last, to take the lowest place, humbling herself that she might be (ver. 61) afterwards exalted.

Ver. 55.—Read *and* for **when**, as in ver. 53.

Ver. 56.—**Thy sister Sodom, etc.** The words are obscure. The most tenable interpretation may be expressed by a paraphrase. The name of Sodom was not in the lips of Judah in the days of her prosperity. It was too vile for utterance, except as a byword of reproach. Isaiah (i. 9, 10) had in vain reminded her that she had made herself like them. Her fate could never be like theirs. Now, in the day of the discovery (the uncovering, or laying bare) of her wickedness (ver. 57), she had learnt the lesson.

Ver. 57.—For **thy reproach,** read, with the Revised Version, *the reproach*. The words point primarily to the disasters, not of Judah, but to those that fell on the cities of Syria and Philistia—the Assyrian and Chaldean invasions. (For the grouping of the two nations as enemies of Judah, see Isa. ix. 12; and for special acts of hostility, 2 Kings xv. 37; xvi. 6; and 2 Chron. xxviii. 18, 19.)

Ver. 58.—**Thou hast borne, etc.** Judah, *i.e.*, had received the full measure of its punishments. The righteousness of God had been adequately vindicated. And so, if the punishment led to repentances, there was room for pardon (compare for the thought, Isa. xl. 2).

Vers. 59, 60.—**I will even deal with thee, etc.** The law of retribution is stated in all its fulness. Falling back upon the idea of the espousals of Israel in the covenant made at Sinai (Lev. xxvi, 42, 45; Deut. xxix. 11, 12), Ezekiel presses home on Judah the thought that she had broken that covenant. She must suffer as though it no longer existed. She must "dree her weird" and "accept her punishment" (Lev. xxvi. 41). And then Jehovah would show that he had not really been unmindful of his part in it. He had remained faithful in spite of her unfaithfulness. And so in the day of her repentance he will not only renew it, but will give it a higher and more permanent character. The "new covenant" of which Ezekiel's master had spoken (Jer. xxxi. 31) should not be as the old, decaying and vanishing away, but should be for everlasting.

Ver. 61.—**Then thou shalt remember thy ways, etc.** The pardon which God gives is not, as men sometimes dream, a water of Lethe, blotting out the memory of the evil past. Ezekiel represents that memory as quickened to a new intensity in the very hour of restoration. The shame which it brings with it is necessary as the safeguard of the new blessedness. **Thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger.** It is significant that, as in the Revised Version, both the adjectives are now in the plural. What was possible for Sodom and Samaria was possible also, as for the cities more immediately connected with them, so also for other nations of the heathen world. They too should be admitted into fellowship, not now as sisters, but as daughters, acknowledging, *i.e.*, her superiority. The limitation which follows, **not by thy covenant,** asserts, as it were, the restored prerogative of Judah, much as St. Paul asserts it in Rom. ix.—xi. Those who are within the covenant of Israel, including, as it does, those who are the heirs of the faith of Abraham as well as his children according to the flesh, are in a closer relation to him than others who share in what have been called (the phrase, perhaps, taking its origin from these very words) the "uncovenanted mercies" of God.

Ver. 63.—**That thou mayest remember.** The words paint vividly the attitude of the penitent adulteress, humble, contrite, silent, ashamed (Hos. iii. 3—5), and yet with a sense that she is pardoned, and that the husband against whom she has sinned is at last pacified. Revised Version, *when I have forgiven thee*. The Hebrew verb so rendered is that which expresses the fullest idea of forgiveness, and which marked both the "day" and the "sacrifice" of atonement (Numb. viii. 12; Lev. xxiii. 27, *et al.*). This, according to the received etymology, was represented in the mercy-seat, the *ἱλαστήριον*, of the ark of the covenant (*cophereth*, as from *caphar*). So the prophet closes with the words of an eternal hope what had at first seemed to lead up to nothing but eternal condemnation. How far the prophet expected a literal fulfilment in the restoration of Sodom and Samaria, we cannot define with certainty; but the ideal picture of the purification of the waters of the Dead Sea in ch. xlvii. 8 suggests that it entered into his vision of the future. For us, at least, it is enough to pass from the temporal to the eternal, from the historical to the spiritual, and to see in his words the noblest utterance of mercy prevailing over judgment—a *theodikæa*, a "vindication of the ways of God to man," like that of Rom. xi. 33—36.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 3.—*Evil parentage.* The Jews boasted of their descent from Abraham, but Ezekiel told them that they were children of the Canaanite aborigines of their land, because it was from those people that they drew their present character.

I. ORIGINAL PARENTAGE MAY BE LOST. A man may inherit the throne of a great king, but if he has a mean and servile disposition, and inherits no kingly nature, he is not a true son of his father. Titles and estates may pass from men of high powers to imbeciles. The good name of a worthy Christian man may be borne by a worthless descendant. We cannot entail character. No man can be certain that his children will follow his example, however good and attractive that may be, and when it is not followed the true man is not represented by his children. Thus Christ would not permit his contemporaries to call themselves Abraham's children (John viii. 39—41). This does not mean that he disputed their genealogical records. Apart from those prosaic tests of pure blood were the more serious signs of apostasy and disinheritance. In like manner, it is possible to lose the status of Divine sonship, although by nature we are all God's children. It may even be surmised that Ezekiel had lost the recollection of the true origin of the Israelites, and had come to regard them as descendants of the Canaanites.

II. A NEW PARENTAGE MAY BE ACQUIRED. The Jews were not Amorites and Hittites by natural descent. But though on their entering Canaan there was an express understanding that they were to drive out the inhabitants of the land and form no league with them, they failed in that enterprise, leaving many of the original inhabitants in their midst, from whom they contracted habits of idolatry. We are all more or less influenced by our surroundings, and it is therefore of great importance that we should not choose hurtful companions. But there is a way of resisting a bad example when we cannot escape from its physical proximity. To yield to it is a sign of weakness and sin. The result is to make us spiritually the children of those we follow. The most vital inheritance is that of character. Though the blood of Abraham flowed in the veins of the apostate Jews, the spirit of Amorites and Hittites had possession of their minds and hearts. Therefore the chief part of their lives was derived from the adopted ancestors. A natural Christian parentage is of little account if a spiritual parentage of sin has been accepted by the degenerate children.

III. THE EXCHANGE OF AN ORIGINAL WORTHY PARENTAGE FOR A NEW EVIL PARENTAGE IS AN UNSPEAKABLE DISGRACE. Israel had been accustomed to despise the Canaanites. To have to own a father and mother among those effete subject-races was a shame for the proud conquerors of Canaan. But a worse disgrace lay in the abandonment of the lofty spirit of the patriarchs and the adoption of the degraded character of the heathen. It is a shame when the children of Christian parents sink into the condition of children of this world. They know better; they have seen worthy examples; they have been trained under good influences; they have received high privileges. We expect the sow to wallow in the mire, but when a person of higher origin follows her example he degrades himself far below the shameful state of the unclean animal.

Vers. 9—13.—*The glory of redemption.* Under the similitude of a wretched child cast off by its mother and picked up by a passer-by, Israel is shown to have been found by God in a miserable condition and cared for and blessed by him. This idea may be carried further as a symbol of the redemption of the Church by Christ.

I. THE FIRST CONDITION IS ONE OF POLLUTION AND NEGLECT. Israel was in a miserable condition in Egypt when God had pity on his people. But the spiritual state of souls in sin is more wretched and forlorn. 1. It is a condition of *pollution.* Sinners lie in the defilement of their own sinfulness, and their wretched plight is the direct consequence of their own moral corruption. 2. It is a condition of *neglect.* Until God interfered, Israel in Egypt was friendless. No kindred Semitic tribe cared or dared to rescue the nation of slaves. No being came to save the world before God made bare his arm.

II. THE FIRST STEP TO RECOVERY SPRINGS FROM THE PITY OF GOD. The good Samaritan is a type of our great Father. There is no beauty in sinful man to attract the attention of God. It is not our claim, but his pity, that moves God to save the world. The love of Christ, not the worth of man, brought our redemption. Pity—commiseration for the wretched—lies at the root of the gospel. God is love, and therefore he comes to the miserable in supreme compassion.

III. THE REDEMPTION BEGINS IN CLEANSING. Sin must be washed away before the soul can be received into the privileges of the family of God. Even this early process is preceded by God's adoption of the wretched castaway, and the cleansing is done by God himself. It is as when a miserable child of the street has been taken by a charitable person into his own home. The child cannot make itself clean. But the first act of the kind rescuer is to wash it. Christ cleanses from sin with his own blood.

IV. THE REDEMPTION IS CROWNED WITH SPLENDOUR. The poor wastling is not treated as a workhouse child or put to low drudgery. She is clothed in purest apparel and decked with rarest ornaments. So the prodigal is to wear the best robe and to have a ring on his hand. God does not save grudgingly or by halves. He does not content himself with plucking the brand from the burning. He gives royally of his best to the miserable sinners whom he has redeemed. The gospel promises glory as well as grace.

V. THE RESCUE AND REDEMPTION ESTABLISH A NEW RELATION WITH GOD. According to the richly illustrative picture of Ezekiel, when the poor abandoned infant is grown up, her rescuer makes her his bride. God is often regarded as the Husband of his people. But here the picture is not of God marrying *any* human soul, but of his marrying the most abandoned. This illustrates his marvellous condescension. At the same time, it shows the supreme duty of fidelity to God on the part of the Church that has been rescued from so dire a fate and then raised to so great an honour.

Ver. 14.—*The renown of Israel.* I. THE NATURE OF THIS RENOWN. 1. *The renown of great deliverance.* The fame of the escape from Egypt and of the overthrow of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea spread over the neighbouring lands, so that when the wandering tribes reached the borders of Canaan, they were known as a people marvellously favoured by God. The renown of the redemption by Christ is less appreciated by those who do not share in that redemption. Still it exists. It is a great thing to be among those on whom God's pity has taken effect, and who have been saved from spiritual destitution. 2. *The renown of glorious victory.* Israel had made her way safely through the wilderness in spite of the arrows of Amalek and the wiles of Moab. She had crossed the Jordan and conquered Canaan. Since then, though often in adversity, she had in the main triumphed over her enemies. The history of the Church is a history of victory over opposition and persecution. Often the faithless people of God have had to suffer shame for their sins. Still, on the whole, there has been success and victory. 3. *The renown of acquired splendour.* It is the beauty of the bride that is renowned. The wealth and wisdom of Solomon brought renown to Israel. For us the renown of Israel is that of her religion—the revelation of God that comes to us through her, and the beautiful stories of her saints and heroes. The Church of Christ has won such a renown through her "noble army of martyrs," and the charity and holiness of her less conspicuous children.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RENOWN. 1. *It redounds to the glory of God.* The bride of Ezekiel's parable had been a wretched castaway. All her splendour of jewels and raiment came from the kindness of her rescuer. All the beauty of holiness in the saints of God is due to the grace of him who has redeemed them from a state of sin and ruin. 2. *It attracts the admiration of men.* Israel was envied and admired by the nations in the days of her prosperity. The true beauty and greatness of the Church win men to Christ, as her sin and shame hinder them. The gospel is preached by the renown of Christian lives. A good biography thus declares the truth on which the life it describes has been built. 3. *It aggravates the shame of unfaithfulness.* That so beautiful and famous a bride should degrade herself, and exchange renown for infamy by proving herself false to her husband, is most shameful. The old renown of beauty adds notoriety to the present disgrace of sin. Israel's apostasy was the more scandalous because her previous condition had been famous. The fall of the Church would be doubly shameful after the glorious history of past achievements. Men who have borne a high character before the world will be marked with a stigma of the greatest contempt if they fall into notorious wickedness. 4. *It preserves an ideal for restoration.* The former glory may be recovered. We see in Christian history types of character to which we should seek to restore the Church. Christ's redemption will confer a higher beauty than that which was lost by Israel's apostasy.

Ver. 15 (first clause, "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty").—*Trust in beauty.* I. THE POSSESSION OF BEAUTY TEMPTS TO UNREASONABLE SELF-CONFIDENCE. 1. *It is felt to be a pleasant endowment.* The national beauty of Israel could not but please the people. Bodily grace and mental gifts are naturally valued by those who own them, for undoubtedly in themselves they are good. 2. *It is flattered with admiration.* The beautiful bride is renowned (see ver. 14). This implies that her beauty was much spoken of. Such a fact could not but be pleasant to one who loved admiration. But the pleasure of receiving flattery is dangerous and deceptive. The person admired is likely to attach too much weight to it. 3. *It is seen to be a means of influence.* There is power in beauty. Admiration rules the admirer. The person who is fawned upon by flattering neighbours seems to exercise a certain power over them.

II. THIS TRUST IN THE POSSESSION OF BEAUTY IS DECEPTIVE. 1. *The beauty is not an original possession.* The beauty of the bride was developed through the kind treatment of her rescuer. The gifts and possessions of Israel were not won by her powers, but conferred by the providence of God. Christian attainments are all endowments of Divine grace. To trust these things to the neglect of him from whom they come, and even to claim them as original resources, is to lean upon a falsehood. This must fail. 2. *The beauty is fleeting.* Nothing is so fragile. When it is most needed it may be found to have departed. To trust it is to lose it (see ver. 39). 3. *The beauty is feeble.* Beauty is not strength. A gorgeously clad army may suffer ignominious defeat in the day of war. Grace and attractiveness in speech and bearing do not signify strength of character. The most winning people may be the most helpless when energy and determination are in requisition.

III. TRUE SECURITY IS FOUND ONLY IN LOOKING AWAY FROM SELF TO CHRIST. 1. *It must come from the abandonment of self-trust.* Even though we are flattered into believing great things of ourselves, taken at the very best, human strength and goodness fail before the assaults of sin. We have to learn that we are "miserable and blind and naked," and to give up the Pharisee's boast for the publican's only plea, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" owning that "all our righteousness is as filthy rags." 2. *The needed security will be found in Christ.* He is strong to save, even though he appears before us in the weakness of human suffering, and with the shame of his cross. At first we may exclaim, "He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. liii. 2). But in the end we can believe the promise, "Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty" (Isa. xxxiii. 17). For if we begin by trusting Christ's saving strength in this world of sin and need, we shall afterwards behold his beauty and glory in the world of light.

Ver. 30 ("How weak is thine heart!").—*A weak heart.* I. THE NATURE OF A WEAK HEART. It has certain characteristics. 1. *Coldness of affection.* The first ardour of love is forgotten, and has given place to a Laodicean indifference. It cannot be said that the soul has lost all interest in God. But the old passion has faded and left only the dull embers of a listless devotion. 2. *Lack of energy.* The weak heart beats feebly, and the person who is afflicted with it does not feel equal to any great exertions. There are souls in this condition of torpor. 3. *Readiness to give way.* The weak heart may be overstrained; its action may be depressed; or it may be excited to unhealthy palpitation. The soul that is similarly affected lacks stability.

II. THE SIGNS OF A WEAK HEART. 1. *Yielding to evil influences.* If the heart were true to God, temptation would be harmless. It is the feeble soul that first falls. When a little fear depresses us, and a little worldly joy distracts from the love of God, the heart cannot be strong in its affection. The stout heart will stand out bravely against the agonies of martyrdom. Thus with the Christian, sin is always a sign of weakness in the first instance. 2. *Failure in service.* Apparent failure may indicate no weakness in God's true servant. The best seed sown by the best sower will fail of fruitfulness if it fall by the wayside or on stony ground. Real failure is in ourselves—it is the giving up of earnest, faithful endeavour. This only comes from a weakness of love. When the heart beats strong and true to God, the service of the life does not flag. 3. *Inability to repent.* The true servant of God is sometimes found in sin. But he grieves over it, and seeks forgiveness with tears of anguish. When he despairs of recovery or will not exert himself to repent, he proves that his love is cold and his heart feeble.

III. THE SINFULNESS OF A WEAK HEART. We have every reason to love God with all our heart, and with a warmth and decision of character that nothing can shake, for we are embraced by his infinite love. The strong heart of God has cared for us in trouble and redeemed us in sin, and we can only measure his love by the preciousness of the gift of his Son. In view of the great love of Christ, proved to us by his death and Passion, any love short of the warmest and strongest shows ingratitude on our part. Note, further, that weakness of heart is sinful on certain definite grounds. 1. *God expects love in the heart,* not merely obedience in the life. 2. *God is not satisfied with measured devotion;* he seeks a whole-hearted love. 3. *Sin in the heart leads to sin in the life;* for "out of it are the issues of life."

IV. THE DANGER OF A WEAK HEART. 1. *It provokes the wrath of God.* It is an insult to the wonderful love of God that we should receive it with a half-hearted response. Christ says to all Laodiceans, "I would thou wert either cold or hot." In some respects weak-hearted devotion is worse than ardent enmity; for it confesses an obligation it does not satisfy. 2. *It leads to death.* The weak heart will become the heart of stone (ch. xi. 19). This degeneracy cannot stay in its present stage. When love to Christ cools, it is on its way to extinction.

Ver. 32.—*The shameful sin of apostasy.* Apostasy is repeatedly compared to adultery by the Old Testament prophets, but the comparison is nowhere so full and powerful and even appalling as in this long sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, which consists in an elaborate indictment of Israel on that terrible charge. A mealy-mouthed modern fastidiousness resents this style of describing sin as though to name it were more shameful than to commit it, for the fact of apostasy from God is by no means excluded when the old name for it is condemned as too coarse for polite society. It may be well for us to brace up our nerves to endure the strong words on the sin of unfaithfulness to God which the inspired messengers of Jehovah felt themselves impelled to utter. In what respects, then, may apostasy be compared to that shameful thing, adultery?

I. IT PRESUPPOSES A MARRIAGE RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. That relation has been described with graphic pictures in the preceding verses. God had chosen Israel in her forlorn condition as a miserable castaway child, reared her in kindness, and then adorned her with splendour and taken her home to himself as his bride. In like manner, all God's people have been first found by him, and then brought into the closest bonds of union with himself. Such a union with God is like marriage, because it implies (1) *love;* (2) *close fellowship;* (3) *a sacred and indissoluble tie.*

II. IT CONSISTS IN UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD. The people of God are not at liberty to leave him whenever they choose. 1. *Love* should bind them. There is no such thing as innocent "free love" under any circumstances; for love always implies obligations. Its bonds may be soft and silken, but they are strong and sacred. God's love to us, accepted by us, carries with it a duty of gratitude and loyalty. 2. *The pledges of* *faith* must ever bind God's people to the duty of cleaving to him. When we accept the blessings of the gospel we enter into a covenant relation like that of marriage vows.

III. IT SPRINGS FROM YIELDING TO A LOWER LOVE. God's people do not forsake him from weariness or without motive. But some fatal fascination lures the heart of the foolish wife from her true husband. In the case of Israel this was the sensuous and florid idolatry of the Canaanites, with its coarse, cruel, lustful charms. Anything that draws us from God by counter-attractions is an "idol of the heart." Money, pleasure, power, success, may thus deceive and destroy. Yet a prior condition of unfaithfulness is the failing of love to God. "How weak is thine heart!"

IV. IT IS A GREAT SIN. Adultery is confessedly a black and awful sin, standing side by side with murder, as a horror of great wickedness. So, according to the Hebrew prophets, is unfaithfulness to God. As we are not free to forsake him who has purchased us at the great cost of his own Son, and to whom we are doubly bound by the ties of our own vows, to "change our mind" in this matter and fling up our religion is not a light affair of private convenience. In the sight of God it is adultery.

V. IT IS A PECULIAR SOURCE OF SHAME AND SORROW. No sin is so shameful as that of adultery, and none brings in its train such heart-rending sorrow. 1. It is *shameful* to be unfaithful to God; for it outrages the deepest instincts of the soul and violates the secret sanctuary of life. 2. It is certainly a source of bitter *sorrow*, if not now, yet hereafter; for it means banishment from the home of heaven, with the pangs of remorse to gnaw like a worm, long after the short pleasures of sin have sunk to ashes.

Ver. 42.—*How God's anger ceases.* I. IT CANNOT CEASE WHILE THE CAUSE FOR IT REMAINS. An irascible person is provoked to wrath by slight causes; but inasmuch as his anger springs chiefly from his own fiery disposition, the cooling of passion allays the rage of wrath, even though circumstances remain unchanged. But God is "slow to anger" (Ps. ciii. 8); he is not wrathful by nature, because in essence he is love. But the anger which is slow to begin is the more deep and terrible, as it does not arise without adequate reason. Further, a weak person may tire of his anger, even though the cause of it remains unchanged. An explosion of wrath exhausts him. He has not the energy for sustained anger. The fire simply burns out. But this cannot be the case with the great, the unexhaustible nature of God. God is ever the same, always true, just, active. Therefore so long as the cause for anger is unchanged, the anger too must remain. "God is angry with the wicked *every day*" (Ps. vii. 11). As long as men continue in sin, so long must God abide in wrath. An eternity of sin must be accompanied by an eternity of Divine anger.

II. IT WILL CEASE WHEN THE OBJECTS OF IT ARE DESTROYED. This appears to be the terrible goal of the text. Gracious as it reads in word, the purport of it is most fearful. It stands between passages of denunciation and condemnation; it cannot describe a kindly cessation of wrath. The anger of God will burn till it has nothing further to consume. Then his fury will rest. Thus it was with Israel nationally. The people were swept away, consumed off the land. Only a "remnant" was spared, a mere stump of the old tree, from which new growths could sprout. We see no more of God's anger against a man when he has been killed. If nothing were interposed for the saving of his soul, the natural consequence of sin run out to its extremity would be destruction. Then God would cease to be angry with the sinner, for the plain reason that there would be no sinner left against whom his wrath would be called forth.

III. IT WILL CEASE WHEN THE CAUSE FOR IT CEASES. There is another way by which the anger of God may be allayed. He is not desirous to see his children destroyed, for he is merciful and gracious. When sin is pardoned, God's fury towards the sinner rests and his jealousy departs. But this pardon does not depend only on the will of God, or he would forgive all his children. 1. It is dependent on *repentance.* So long as the soul persists in impenitence, God's anger cannot cease to burn. It is not simply a question of the amount and guilt of the sin which first provoked God's wrath. The continued impenitence is virtually a prolongation of the guilt. But when the sinner truly repents, God's anger abates. 2. It is also dependent on *Christ's atonement.* We are able to read the words of Ezekiel with a more hopeful meaning than that which the prophet seems to have put upon them, because "we have an Advocate with the

Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the Propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John ii. 1, 2). We read that "the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever," but never that the anger of the Lord endureth for ever. On the contrary, "He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever" (Ps. ciii. 9). Still, God only ceases to be angry either because sin destroys the sinner or because God destroys the sin.

Ver. 43.—*Remembering the days of youth.* I. IT IS NATURAL TO REMEMBER THE DAYS OF YOUTH. The fact that Israel has not done so is remarked on as something strange and unbecoming. Memory is a marvellous possession at which the materialist stumbles, for it involves that mystery, personal identity. We can not merely recall the scenes of bygone years, but, what is more wonderful, we can detect the connecting link of personality that runs through those scenes. Each one of us can say, "I was there in that dreamlike past." Now, while all memory thus recalls the personal past, the memory of our early days does this with peculiar vividness. As time runs out while intermediate scenes are but faintly impressed on the mind and tend to fade off rapidly, the early days remain stamped upon the memory with indelible portraiture. Thus the old man looking across the near past with growing forgetfulness, is able to call up the most vivid recollections of his childhood, as one may look across a valley that lies wrapped in mist, and see the mountains in the far distance rising beyond it sharp and clear. Whatever else we forget, it is most unnatural not to remember the days of our youth.

"Sweet memory, wafted by thy gentle gale,
Oft up the stream of time I turn my sail
To view the fairy-haunts of long-lost hours,
Blest with far greener shades, far fresher flowers."
(Rogers.)

II. IT IS WISE TO REMEMBER THE DAYS OF YOUTH. There is no use in simply lamenting lost happy days, especially as we are likely to view them in the delusive glamour of a fond affection. There can be little good in exclaiming, with Coleridge—

"When I was young!
When I was young! Ah, woful when!"

But there is a wise and helpful use of the memories of youth. 1. *In thankfulness.* It was the sin and shame of Israel that she forsook her Deliverer, not remembering those days of her youth when he had found her forlorn and destitute, and had saved her from destruction. She forgot the deliverance from Egypt. We have had many mercies from our youth up. It is right to remember them with thankfulness. 2. *In warning.* Remembering Egypt should have kept Israel from the danger of Babylon. Forgetfulness of the old bondage led to a heedless encounter with the new captivity. It is well to remember the sad scenes of youth. Some of these may be burnt into the memory beyond hope of forgetfulness. "If cutting off this hand," said a great speaker, holding out his right hand, "would blot out all memories of my misspent youth, I would gladly lose it." But he who orders our lives knows that even these terrible memories may be converted into helpful warnings for the future. Certainly it would be far better if we had not done the deeds which created such memories and necessitated such warnings. 3. *In humility.* Israel's recollection of her old abject condition should humble her. Proud in her later prosperity, she scorned to remember the pit from which she was digged. People who have risen in society do not like to be reminded of their lowly youth. Yet the humility that comes from knowing how feeble we once were is wholesome. 4. *In encouragement.* When in the most abject wretchedness Israel was saved by God. That was a glorious fact to be ever treasured up in the memories of youth. The recollection of such a deliverance should cheer with hope of similar mercy in future times of need.

Ver. 53.—*The salvation of Sodom.* That the notoriously wicked cities of the plain should come under the saving grace of God would seem to be one of the greatest paradoxes of redemption, and the more so as those cities had been utterly destroyed and the very sites of them obliterated. A reference to such an event opens up to us a marvellous vista in the deep possibilities of the future.

I. THEY WHO ARE EQUAL IN SIN WILL BE EQUAL IN REDEMPTION. There is even some comfort to us in the sight of the great wickedness of the Jews, or rather in what is based upon it. We read of repeated promises of restoration for Israel. Now, if the chosen people had been exceptionally virtuous, or but mildly culpable in comparison with the rest of the world, it might well have been surmised that the salvation which was possible for Israel could not be stretched to reach others of greater wickedness. But if the "Jerusalem sinners" are equal to the worst of the world's wicked people, if Jerusalem is sister to Samaria and Sodom in evil, the salvation which touches the one class of sinners may extend to the other. God is no respecter of persons. He has no favouritism. Redemption is as wide as sin.

II. CHRIST'S REDEMPTION AIMS AT EMBRACING ALL SINNERS. His redemption is universal in two respects. 1. *In extent.* As the Lamb of God, he came to take away the sin of the *world* (John i. 29), not the sins of a certain nation, or those of one section of society. He commanded that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his Name among all nations" (Luke xxiv. 47). If the gospel is to be offered to all, it must be that the salvation is effective for all. Nothing less could satisfy the heart of Jesus, and "he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isa. liii. 11). 2. *In intensity.* Not only are sinners of all nations and of all sections of society included in the redeeming love of Christ; sinners of blackest guilt are also within its merciful and mighty embrace. (1) Christ is *willing* to save the worst, even the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah; for there is no limit to his pity. (2) He is *able* to save the worst; for he is "able to save unto the *uttermost* all that come unto God by him." To doubt that the worst can be saved is either to malign his love or to insult his power.

III. CHRIST'S REDEMPTION SHOULD BE APPLIED TO ALL SINNERS. It is not sufficient that he has died for the sins of the whole world, nor that he is willing to save all—Jerusalem, Samaria, Sodom, the very worst. For only they are effectually saved who have personally partaken of the grace of Christ. 1. *It must be offered to all.* Herein lies the duty of universal missionary agency. The gospel should be preached to the most remote nations, to the most degraded savages, to the most abandoned sinners. It is not for us to say that any are beyond its saving grace. But how of the heathen dead? how of Sodom, that has been utterly destroyed? how can Sodom be redeemed? Sodom may stand typically for the worst contemporary sinners. Yet the truth of the text will be most completely satisfied if we deem it possible that Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison extended to the men of Sodom (1 Pet. iii. 20). 2. *It needs to be taken by all.* Christ died to redeem all, even the worst sinners, yet none share in his redemption save through penitence and faith.

Ver. 60.—*The everlasting covenant.* God's relations with his people are repeatedly described as determined by covenants. Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the nation of Israel, all had their covenants with God, and Christ established a new covenant.

I. THE COVENANT RELATION. 1. *It originates in God.* The covenant is not an agreement made by two parties who meet on equal terms. It cannot be compared to the bond which seals a bargain after mutual concessions. It is rather an institution of God which man accepts. We cannot determine or in any way modify the conditions of God's covenant. As the Giver of blessing and the Lord of service, God offers us his settled covenant. 2. *It must be accepted by man.* The covenant relation has two sides. When we desire to share its privileges we must ourselves enter into it. We must freely accept it. 3. *It involves mutual obligations.* (1) God graciously undertakes to do certain things for man, even condescending to bind himself with promises. (2) We are bound to loyal obedience, and the seal of the covenant ratifies those obligations. Thus it gives man a right to "covenant mercies," and God a right to "covenant service."

II. THE OLD COVENANT. God had covenant relations with Israel in ancient days. The sinful people had violated the conditions of the covenant, and so, while excluding themselves from its privileges, they had brought its penalties down upon their heads (ver. 59). God might therefore only remember his covenant in order to carry out its penal clauses. But he is seen to remember it on its gracious side. This could not be because he held himself bound to its promises, for the Jews had forfeited all rights in those promises. Therefore God's remembrance of the covenant is his merciful calling to mind of previous happy relations. God is not ready to forsake his people with whom he made a covenant in the olden times. It may be the same with the individual souls. There are men who followed God in their childhood, perhaps learning to love him from a mother's teaching, and entering into solemn promises to live for him in the hopeful days of youth. They may have forgotten those fair times of the long-dead past. But God remembers them, and in his wonderful, enduring love he delights to revive them, and therefore he calls his erring children back to the forsaken paths.

III. THE NEW COVENANT. 1. *Its necessity.* (1) On account of *the failure of the former covenant.* The old covenant being broken and having proved ineffectual, a new one must be instituted. (2) On account of *the new needs of new times.* The new wine must not be put into the old bottles. The Jewish Law which suited ancient Israel is not adapted to Christendom. 2. *Its origin.* It is based on the old covenant. God remembers that old covenant in granting a new one. The New Testament rests on the foundation of the Old Testament. Christ came to fulfil the Law by establishing the gospel (Matt. v. 17). The same Divine grace, which in its dawn shone through the earlier dispensation, in its noon glorifies the later one. 3. *Its stability.* It is to be an everlasting covenant. The old covenant was local, temporary, and fragile on the human side, though firm as adamant on God's side. The new covenant must have other characteristics to make it more enduring. (1) It is an *inward, spiritual principle* (Jer. xxxi. 33). (2) It is *sealed by the blood of Christ* (1 Cor. xi. 25), is bound to the cross by his sacrifice and our love.

Ver. 63.—*Confounded by memory.* I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE CONFOUNDED BY MEMORY. 1. *Memory of sin.* We desire to forget our sin; but even if no recording angel wrote it down in the books of Divine judgment, the tooth of conscience would bite the memory of it into the very fibre of our hearts. We may succeed in drowning the hideous recollection for a time, but it seems to be proved that the forgotten past may be revived, and that all our life may be brought to mind in an awful flash of recollection, as in the experience of drowning men, or as we all find in the unexpected reminders of old associations suddenly encountered. When our hideous old sins thus glare upon our startled gaze, surely we must be confounded! 2. *Memory of mercy.* We may not note the favours of providence with which we are daily visited, and we may be accepting them with ingratitude and even abusing them with disobedience. But some day the goodness of God in our past will rise up in memory and accuse our ill reception of it. 3. *Memory of opportunity.* When the day of service is past and the night wherein no man can work has fallen upon us, it will be useless to plead our lack of opportunity for following God. Many a warning voice, many an appealing invitation, many an open door, many a day of grace, will confront our guilty souls. 4. *Memory of the lost.* If we have not been true or kind to those near to us, we shall remember the wrong, when, alas! it is too late to make amends, and the recollection will be confounding.

II. TO BE CONFOUNDED BY MEMORY WILL BE A JUST PUNISHMENT. 1. *It will be a punishment.* Many consequences of sin may be met with a brazen face, but not this. We may even cherish the memory of our evil past with a bad affectionateness, but when it meets us to confound us, all our bravado will be killed, and nothing will remain but shame and anguish and remorse. To be confounded means to have our career arrested, to be put to confusion, to be cast down in dismay, to make shipwreck of life. When we fully face the memory of our evil past, impenitent and unpardoned, no less a result can follow. This sin is its own chastisement. The serpent of evil inflicts a deadly wound with its own fangs. There is no necessity for heavenly thunderbolts to dash the sinner to destruction. No demon tormentors need be summoned from Tartarus to torture his guilty soul. His own memory will strike him, his own thoughts will burn and tear and rack his miserable conscience. "Unnatural seeds do breed unnatural troubles." 2. *This punishment will be just.* It will be the direct consequence of sin. There can be no pretence that the accusation is false. No man can set up the plea of an *alibi* against the charges of his own memory. Here is a witness who cannot be upset by the most rigorous cross-examination, nor discredited by the bitterest opprobrium. Accused by his own memory, the sinner cannot but be speechless. There is no conceivable escape when the court of justice is a man's own breast and when witnesses, judge, jury, and executioner are all found in his own thoughts.

> "To be left alone
> And face to face with my own crime, had been
> Just retribution."
>
> (Longfellow.)

These terrible thoughts are not written to drive us mad, but to urge us to amendment. When there is no door of escape from the awful chamber of self-judgment the great necessity is to seek a new heart and a Divine pardon that we may never be "confounded by memory."

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*Undeserved and lavish kindness.* The Prophet Ezekiel was a prophet of reproach. His ministry largely consisted in rebuke and denunciation. His lot fell upon the time of his country's calamity. Defection and apostasy were punished by national disaster; for whilst the exiles endured the ills of banishment, the remnant in Jerusalem and in Judah endured the horrors of siege. That all the evils inflicted upon the Hebrew people were of the nature of righteous punishment is apparent from the record of their departure from God. It is this point which the prophet presses in this chapter—one of the most painful in the inspired volume. The distinguishing favour, bounty, and forbearance of God are described as aggravating the national guilt. That a people so favoured should forsake him to whom they owed everything, and should addict themselves to the worship and service of idols, was guilt of no ordinary kind, entailing no ordinary chastisement. The figure under which the prophet sets forth the Divine favour towards Jerusalem, and Jerusalem's disloyalty to God, is a very bold and effective figure; and if it were less painful and distressing it would be less just. Jerusalem is represented first as a low-born, neglected babe, taken under the kindly protection of the Lord, and by him nourished and trained to lovely womanhood, and taken for his own spouse. Ungrateful for this kindness, Jerusalem is pictured as unfaithful to him to whom she owed everything, as prostituting herself to her idolatrous neighbours, indulging her own passions, and dishonouring her rightful Lord. In plain and pungent language her monstrous guilt is exposed, and its due punishment is threatened. Yet, in his amazing compassion, the Lord does not abandon and repudiate her whom he had chosen, but invites her to repentance, and promises to renew the covenant of his loving-kindness. In the early part of the chapter the goodness and pity of God towards Jerusalem are portrayed in terms the most touching and affecting.

I. GOD'S GRACIOUS KINDNESS APPEARS FROM THE RECORD OF THE ORIGIN AND EARLY STATE OF JERUSALEM. In ver. 3 the prophet reminds Jerusalem whence she had sprung. Her native place was the land of Canaan, a land notorious for the cruelty and vileness of its inhabitants. Her father was an Amorite, and her mother a Hittite—an ancestry of which she could not be vain. There was, accordingly, nothing in the birth and breeding of Jerusalem which could commend her to the Divine regard; that regard must have been altogether disinterested, benignant, and compassionate.

II. GOD'S SPARING MERCY APPEARS FROM HIS TREATMENT OF JERUSALEM IN THE TIME OF HER WORTHLESSNESS AND WRETCHEDNESS. Under the graphically depicted figure of a deserted new-born child, the condition of Jerusalem is portrayed as one of neglect, destitution, and friendlessness. When in such a state she was seen and pitied by the Benevolent One, who rescued her from death, who nurtured her gently, and provided for her all that could minister to her health, her growth, her vigour, her beauty. Whatever was justly written in praise of Jerusalem, in her fairest and brightest days, must be read in connection with this authoritative statement of the grace and kindness of God her Saviour. She had nothing which she did not receive from him who made her to differ.

III. GOD'S LOVING-KINDNESS APPEARS IN THE COVENANT INTO WHICH HE ENTERED WITH JERUSALEM. In the eighth and following verses is described in glowing language the favour which God had to Jerusalem in the day of her espousals. The covenant of love was entered into, and the bride was arrayed in magnificent and costly attire, indicative of the bounty and kindness of her Lord. The poet-prophet rises to his highest strain in singing of the beauty and majesty of the elected spouse of Jehovah. "Thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper unto royal estate. And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my majesty, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God."

IV. GOD'S GRACE APPEARS IN THE EXALTATION OF JERUSALEM TO A POSITION OF FAVOUR AND HONOUR. The wealth and splendour, the power and renown, of Jerusalem, especially in the reign of Solomon, are matters of history. The fame of Jerusalem was spread afar: she was "the joy of the whole earth." And this was the explanation: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for an habitation." "I," said the Lord—"I sware unto thee, and thou becamest mine."—T.

Vers. 15—59.—*Inexcusable infidelity.* Universal consent accounts that woman vile who, married to a kind and honourable husband, in order to gratify her own unchastened desires, commits adultery with her neighbours and acquaintances, and expends her husband's substance in rewarding her numerous and profligate admirers. The guilt of Jerusalem must indeed have been great if it could only be adequately set forth under the similitude of guilt so flagrant and abominable as that described in this most appalling chapter. Passing away from the figure to the reality, we have to trace the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem to him who had saved her from death, distinguished her by favour, and exalted her to honour.

I. JERUSALEM'S DISLOYALTY ORIGINATED IN HER ASSUMING AS HER OWN WHAT WAS REALLY THE GIFT AND GRACE OF GOD. What a lesson is there in the striking expression, "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty"!—thine own, as if for that beauty thou hadst to thank thyself; as if it were aught else than the gift of Divine bounty and the token of Divine favour! We are far less likely to abuse our position and our possessions if we do but remember that they are not ours, save by God's kindness, and that we are not our own.

II. DISLOYALTY ORIGINATED IN FORGETFULNESS OF DIVINE GRACE AND COMPASSION. Very touching is that expression in ver. 22, "Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth." Here is the radical error. It is pride and self-confidence that leads men astray. They who are forgetful of God are in danger of being unfaithful to him. Jerusalem said, "I sit a queen!" And saying so, she fell. It is a too common experience. The Christian may learn to cultivate the spirit of complete dependence upon God; for the consciousness that he owes all to God will help to bind him to loyal allegiance and constant service.

III. DISLOYALTY WAS MANIFESTED IN THE ADOPTION OF THE IDOLATRY OF SURROUNDING NATIONS. In Jerusalem and the neighbourhood the deities of the several peoples to the east, north, and south of Palestine had their deluded votaries; and not only so, idolatry was openly practised. With spiritual wantonness the citizens of the great and glorious city admitted and embraced every form of idolatry, and that even within sight, if not within the precincts, of the very temple of Jehovah.

IV. DISLOYALTY LED TO CONFORMITY TO ALL THE VILE PRACTICES WHICH ARE CONNECTED WITH IDOLATRY. Cruel and lustful rites, it is well known, were associated with heathen worship. In vers. 20 and 21 reference is made to the practice, connected with the worship of Moloch, of causing sons and daughters to pass through the fire. This was but one of the abominable and reprehensible practices encouraged by heathen priests. When these practices are compared with the observances of the Law of Moses, who can avoid the conclusion that, whereas the former were the invention of sinful men, the latter bear marks of appointment by a pure and merciful God? Once let men abandon the true religion, and "go after false gods," and none can tell into what excesses of iniquity they may be led.

V. DISLOYALTY WAS CARRIED TO AN EXTENT EXTRAVAGANT AND MONSTROUS. Jerusalem is compared with Samaria and with Sodom, and is represented as "corrupted more than they in all her ways!" Indeed, had not the abominations wrought in Jerusalem been flagrant, the language of this chapter would not have been justified. The abuse of the best is ever the worst. The greater the height from which the fall, the severer is the hurt received. The Lord was aggrieved by the lengths to which the disobedient proceeded, the riot of iniquity into which they ran.

VI. Forbearance with disloyalty gave place to Divine displeasure, indignation, and wrath. The conduct of Jerusalem is not unobserved and is not uncensured, Mercy has been defied, and just authority has been set at naught. It is not possible that infidelity so flagrant can be overlooked. Severe and righteous is the resolution of the almighty King, "I will judge thee;" "I will even deal with thee as thou hast done." Not only has Jerusalem to reckon with justice that cannot be perverted and with wisdom that cannot be eluded; it has to reckon with power that cannot be resisted. When God arises to judgment and calls the nations before him, a righteous sentence is pronounced, to which all must submit, and which none can question.

VII. Those who tempted Jerusalem to disloyalty were made instruments in Jerusalem's punishment. The lovers are called in to minister punishment to the adulteress; the surrounding nations, especially the Assyrians and Chaldeans and the Egyptians, were made instrumental in chastising the people that had permitted themselves to be deluded and seduced by their vile idolatries. Jerusalem's sin was great in proportion to her privileges, and her affliction was as her sin. And there was an awful appropriateness in the employment of the heathen people to chastise those who should have witnessed against their follies instead of being partakers of their sins.—T.

Vers. 60—63.—*Reconciliation.* It is not possible to conceive a more sudden and extraordinary change than that which occurs in passing from the fifty-ninth to the sixtieth verse of this chapter. From an exposure of the vilest treachery and threats of condign and awful punishment, the Lord, speaking by the mouth of his prophet, passes to promises of the most gracious and tender character. It is a wonderful revelation of the Divine heart. As the moral Governor, the Administrator of the affairs of nations, the Lord protests against his people's defection, and denounces upon them the just punishment of their sins. But he does not forget that they are his people. He foresees that the discipline through which they are to pass will not be lost upon them, that their heart will be wrung by contrition, and that their life will witness to their repentance. He promises that he will be pacified towards them, and that reconciliation shall take the place of rebellion and of punishment.

I. On God's side mercy is remembered in the midst of wrath. The King pities his subjects even when they are in insurrection against him. It is their own interests that they are jeopardizing, their own sentence of condemnation that they are writing. The Lord of all, whilst he is displeased with the ingratitude and disobedience of his subjects, still retains his own character; there is no vindictiveness in his government; he ever delights in mercy.

II. On the side of Jerusalem there is sincere repentance and shame. While God remembers his covenant, Jerusalem remembers her ways, and the memory awakens shame and confusion. The poignant appeal has not been made in vain. The mirror has been held up before the face of the sinful and abandoned, and the guilty heart has been conscious of its sin. Conduct, which has been the outcome of unrestrained passion or of an unreflecting yielding to external influence, is now seen in its true light. Deliberate wickedness is deliberately regretted and deliberately loathed. "To us belong shame and confusion of face."

III. There is re-establishment of the broken covenant. This covenant dates back from the time of Jerusalem's youth; her infidelity has indeed cancelled it; but God, in his grace, is willing to overlook and forgive all that is past, and to renew the sweet and happy relations of other times. It is a miracle of mercy. God's ways are not as our ways. Human magnanimity, in its noblest exercise, falls short of this action of the holy God. Here is a revelation of the Divine character which may well bring comfort and hope to the sinner who has forsaken and defied his God, but who sees and repents his folly and his guilt. In the light of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the language is infinitely encouraging. There is a covenant of grace into which the righteous God admits, not Israel only, but mankind—a covenant in which all the giving is on God's side, and all the receiving is on ours.

IV. There is an assurance of acceptance and pacification. The false prophets had proclaimed a false peace; a true peace comes only from him who is the God alike of righteousness and of mercy. When he declares, in the language of the text, "I am pacified toward thee," then it is well. When he giveth peace, who can give trouble? The transgressions of other days are forgotten; the estrangement of other days has given place to concord and harmony. Reverence and love are offered by those who were once in rebellion. And favour and everlasting love are revealed by him who but lately uttered words of reproach, and inflicted chastisement and punishment. It is the happy experience of the justified and accepted believer in Christ which breaks forth into the joyful exclamation, "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."—T.

Vers. 1—14.—*Superhuman love.* The main difficulty in producing a moral reformation among men is to convince them of their degradation—of the low level to which they have sunk. The first thing to be done is to hold up to their view some bright mirror, in the which they may discern clearly what manner of men they are. Such a mirror is provided in the chapter under consideration. We have pictured here—

I. A FORMER LOATHSOME CONDITION. Sin is not merely resistance against proper authority, it is also personal pollution—a defilement of the soul. 1. *A base origin.* "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother was a Hittite." It is often edifying to look "to the rock whence we were hewn"—to the meanness of our earthly parentage. The ancestors of the Hebrews were idolaters—a branch of that very race whom they despised and drove out. They had no superior dignity from their forefathers. All the superiority they enjoyed, had come from the special favour of Jehovah. 2. *Their neglected condition.* The kindness of common humanity had been denied to them in their infantile state. Their ancestors, the Amorites, cared nothing for them; yea, treated them as aliens in the land. Again and again Abraham was driven away by famine, and had to find sustenance by favour in the land of Egypt. At length, in the days of Jacob, "they were cast out into the open field," *i.e.* into the land of Egypt. They soon had no protection nor security from the Egyptian government. They were reduced to thraldom; their lives were made bitter. 3. *They were even loathsome to all.* To the Egyptians they were an abomination. They were hated of all men. It may have been on account of pusillanimity and mean-spiritedness—the effect of long servitude. It may have been on account of their peculiar customs—their clannishness. It may have been because of their peculiar religion, so different from all the nations. Yet there was the fact that no nation would make alliance with them. 4. *Their forlorn and abandoned state.* As a female child is often, in Eastern lands, abandoned on the hills—left to perish from want, or to be devoured by wild beasts—so, as far as human protection was afforded, Israel was exposed to early death. The Egyptians did their utmost to exterminate the race. The Amalekites and the Edomites followed in the same track. Israel was isolated in the world—treated as a foe by all.

II. GENEROUS TREATMENT BY GOD. Dispossessed of all natural attractions, God chose to show to this abandoned child special favour. The only explanation is, "So it seemed good in his sight." He giveth not to men a reason for his doings. 1. *There was a look of love.* The extreme helplessness of a little child often moves to pity the heart of a stolid man. Unless friendly help be at once afforded by the passer-by, the puny child must perish. So the time of Israel's desolateness was the time of Jehovah's love. No other sentiment came into play then but the royal sentiment of love. The very heart of God looked out through his eye. 2. *There was kindly protection.* True love is not content with sentiment, nor yet with smiles, nor yet with words: it goes out in practical deeds. The best thing to be done was done at once. "I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness." 3. *There was appropriate cleansing.* As soon as the imperilled life was secured, the health and comfort of the child became Jehovah's concern. "I washed thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood." The God of heaven condescended to do this menial work. His real glory is seen in his amazing humility. He deigns to wash us still—to wash the soul from all its foulness. 4. *There was the forthputting of vital power.* "I said unto thee, Live!" The voice of God is a resistless energy. God's word is creative: "He speaks, and it is done." He who spake to the primitive chaos, "Let there be light!" and light was, speaks also to the soul dead in sin, and says effectually, "Live!" However near the brink of doom, they shall live, if God speaks the quickening word. "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning?" 5. *Multiplication of life.* He made the one into many. "I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field." He who in the beginning of creation ordained that every plant should produce seed after its own kind, ordained that Israel should be fruitful above the ordinary measure of mankind. "As the stars of heaven, so shall thy seed be," was the promise to Abraham. And the promise was fulfilled. "They of the city flourished as the grass of the earth." Growth of population is an accepted sign of national prosperity. 6. *A gracious alliance.* "I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine." Though other nations refused to make alliances with Israel, Jehovah did so of his own accord. He treated them with most favourable consideration. He dealt with them as with free men—men endowed with reason and judgment. He made a compact with them, by which he bound himself to befriend them, on condition that they would loyally serve him. This was an act of stupendous grace. God dealt with them as if they were his equals. It was a voluntary marriage. 7. *There was also splendid adornment.* "I clothed thee also with broidered work," etc. This once-abandoned child was not only rescued, but was raised to dignity and honour. Her clothing was costly; her beauty set off to the greatest advantage. From the lowest grade of human life she was lifted to the very highest. Her person was adorned with richest ornaments, embellished with jewels and gold. Her dowry was magnificent, princely. Her condition was made by God a condition of luxury and splendour. 8. *There was conferred on her queenly honour and renown.* "I put a beautiful crown upon thy head." "Thou didst prosper into a kingdom." To this rescued child no earthly good was denied. She had more than heart could desire. Other countries were despoiled to enrich her. She was exalted to a place of high renown. Foreign nations became her servants, and kings her ministers. On the summit of earthly glory she sat enthroned, the wonder and the envy of the world. Which thing is an allegory. From the mire of moral pollution we have been raised: we have been put among God's sons. "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ;" "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—D.

Vers. 20—34.—*Idolatry is spiritual adultery.* Imagery borrowed from nature and human society, to set forth Israel's sin, is at the best feeble and imperfect. If it is possible for God to make some impression on man's guilty conscience, he will do it. What is more abominable among men than adultery? Yet connivance with idolatry is a sin blacker yet. It is adultery, ingratitude, robbery, treason, rolled into one crime!

I. MARK THE ROOTS OF THIS SIN. 1. *The first root mentioned is pride.* "Thou didst trust in thy beauty." Love of admiration led her astray. The desire to obtain alliance and friendship with neighbouring nations paved the way. Pride is a bewitching sin. It is often the first rift in the lute that spoils the music of the life. 2. *Another root was ingratitude.* "Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth." The Hebrew nation forgot its singular origin. If God had not called Abraham out of Chaldea, there would have been no Hebrew nation. Had God not appeared again and again to defend them, they would have perished. They were singularly indebted to God, and they were singularly ungrateful. This comes of a stony heart. Be shocked at the first appearance of ingratitude, whether towards man or towards God. 3. *Another root was irresolution*—a lack of firmness and courage. "How weak is thy heart!" Feeble-minds often go astray. Indolence is incipient sin. The neglect of sound moral culture in youth is a fount of sin, a fount of misery. To be safe, there must be robustness in every virtue, vigour in every good quality. A weak man becomes vain, and is the dupe of the first temptation.

II. THE BRANCHES OF THIS SIN. 1. *A multiplicity of idols.* "Thou pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by." The taste of every inhabitant was indulged. They had "lords many and gods many:" "According to thy cities are thy gods, O Israel!" He who refuses to be ruled by one Supreme Father soon becomes the slave of a thousand tyrants. 2. *Sacrilege.* "Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels, of my gold and my silver . . . and madest to thyself images of men." This was a vile desecration of Jehovah's property. "What have we that we have not received?" Every endowment of mind, every organ of body, every item of material substance, belongs to God by right inalienable. They are his by right of creation, by right of sustentation, by right of purchase. They are "redeemed by precious blood." Every coin of silver or of gold has God's image impressed on it. To use any such treasure in the service of idols is basest sacrilege, is wanton felony. 3. *Foul murder.* "Thou hast slain my children." Idolatry of every sort is cruel in its spirit and desolating in its effects. Religion is the truest philanthropy. In proportion as we love God we love our children, love our fellow-men. Idolatry reverses all the machinery of human nature and poisons all its springs of affection. It changes life to death. 4. *Utter shamelessness.* "Thou hast made thee a high place in every street." Every eminence, yea, every shady grove, they had consecrated to some stupid idol. Not content to have a whorish heart, Israel had a whore's forehead. She did not blush for her sin. Worse, she gloried in her depravities. Stupor of conscience is a foul branch in this upas tree.

III. THE FRUITS OF THIS SIN. 1. *Unprofitableness.* "Thou givest a reward, and no reward is given unto thee." As a rule, men yield to sin because they think it will bring them some temporary advantage. But idolatry brings no gain. It is imbecile to expect any boon from a senseless idol. It is expenditure with no return; hard ploughing and no reaping. 2. *Discontent.* "Thou couldst not be satisfied." The more gods they had, the more they wanted. Idolatry excites desire; it does not appease the craving. Discontent is incipient hell. 3. *Famine.* "I have diminished thine ordinary food." God tried lesser chastisements before he employed the greater. A good physician will cut off a limb if thereby he can save a life. If the people had had a ray of light in their understanding, they would have discovered that Jehovah alone had the power to bestow good or to inflict evil. 4. *Thraldom.* "I have delivered thee unto the will of them that hate thee." Here is the culmination of disgrace and sorrow and ruin. To fall into the power of a malicious foe is slavery, which sends its fetters into the soul. Better death than *this*; for this is perpetual crucifixion. Under this brand of righteous indignation the land of Israel still continues.—D.

Vers. 35—43.—*Judicial verdict.* It is a great kindness done by any one if he disclose to us the real nature of our sin. Light from any quarter should be welcomed. To demonstrate to the Hebrews that their idolatry was the worst form of adultery was an act of condescension on the part of God. By their own state law they knew that this sin incurred the penalty of death. With all the circumstance of judicial solemnity, the Supreme Judge summons the attention of the culprit: "O harlot, hear the word of the Lord!"

I. THE JUDICIAL SUMMING-UP. The accusations against Israel were twofold. 1. *Conjugal infidelity.* The covenant made between Jehovah and Israel—the covenant more sacred than between bridegroom and bride—had been wantonly broken. Of this proof was furnished in abundance. It was openly displayed. Shameless publicity marked the deed. 2. *Murder of children.* The children created by God, and on whom he had set peculiar affection, were cruelly sacrificed unto the insatiable idols. It was murder of the worst sort—murder of innocent and helpless victims. No language of man could exaggerate or over-colour the crime.

II. THE RIGHTEOUS SENTENCE. "I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and that shed blood are judged." 1. *The criminal is condemned to public shame.* She had openly boasted of her sin; she shall be openly exposed. She shall be made a spectacle to the world. Care shall be taken to bring her companions and paramours to the sight. The most secret intrigue shall be set in the clear light of day. Friends and foes alike shall witness the disgrace. 2. *Forfeiture of all possessions.* "They shall take thy fair jewels." All the instruments of sin shall be sequestered. The illicit gains of iniquity soon turn to loss. "The wages of sin is death." 3. *Summary death.* "They shall stone thee with stones." This was the penalty assigned to adultery in the Jewish code. This was the penalty for an individual culprit. But for a community, the punishment ordained was the sword. Therefore it is added, "They shall thrust thee through with their swords." In God's world neither adultery nor idolatry shall long be tolerated. 4. *It was an equitable recompense.* "I will recompense thy way upon thy head." The entire punishment proceeded in the most natural way; ay, it proceeded in the way of nature. No strange portent appeared in heaven or earth.

To the carnal eye no hand nor sword of God was manifest; yet full execution of the sentence was done. As at the creation every plant had the latent power to propagate itself, equally every sin carries in itself suitable and adequate punishment. Death is only ripe sin. 5. *It was a satisfaction to eternal righteousness.* "I will be quiet, and will be no more angry." The righteousness of God is a force of tremendous energy, and can only be quieted by adequate repentance or adequate retribution. As the sea cannot be calm while a tempest of wind sweeps over its surface, no more can the justice of God be complacent while sin is rampant. But when sin is atoned for, there is profoundest peace—an eternal calm.—D.

Vers. 44—59.—*Sin seen in the light of comparison.* If men are so encased in worldliness that they cannot see their sin in the light of God's perfect righteousness, they may yet discover some features of their sin in the light of others' conduct, in the light of others' doom. God has employed manifold methods for convincing men of sin.

I. SIN MAY BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF ANOTHER'S FALL. In the case of Israel it might have been seen in a parent's disaster and doom. For their idolatries, and the vices bred of idolatry, the Amorites and Hittites were swept out of the land; yea, swept out by the sword of Israel. They had seen the judgments which God had brought upon idolatry. It was a fact indissolubly linked with their own history. For them to fall into the same sin is inexplicable; it is the climax of depravity.

II. SIN MAY BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF PRIVILEGE. The Hebrews had seen the result of idolatry in the sister-kingdom of Samaria. The calves erected at Dan and Bethel had not availed to save Israel from defeat and ruin. They in Judæa had greater privilege. The visible presence of Jehovah was in their holy of holies. They had the priesthood and the daily sacrifice and the smoking altar of incense in their midst. If some kind of excuse could be framed on behalf of Israel's lapse, no such excuse could be framed for Judah. They knew the better course, yet they chose the worse.

III. SIN MAY BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF REPEATED WARNING. The disaster which fell upon Samaria and upon Sodom was in the nature of warning to them. It was the clearest warning, written in largest characters. Beside these matter-of-fact warnings, they were rebuked by a succession of messengers from God. The sin which was *great* prior to Samaria's fall was greater still after that fall. To continue in sin after repeated warning is to contract fresh sin. Contumely and insubordination are now added. Warning despised is itself a sin.

IV. THE MEASURE OF SIN IS SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF ITS INJURIOUS INFLUENCE ON OTHERS. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had encouraged others to commit idolatry. Other peoples were cloaking themselves under Israel's name. All sin (like some diseases) is terribly contagious. The Jews were inducing others to say, "Well, if these sticklers for an invisible God betake themselves to idols, there must be a reason. *Their* Jehovah must have failed them. After all, idolatry must be at least permissible." "Thou hast justified thy sisters in all thine abomination."

V. THE DOOM OF SIN MAY BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF GOD'S CONSISTENT JUSTICE. "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate . . . *then* thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate." God has not *one* tribunal for the Jews and *another* for the Canaanites. Out of one statute-book all shall be alike judged. Human conduct in every land and in every age shall be measured by one standard rule. As God has dealt with transgressors in former ages, so assuredly will he deal with transgressors in times to come. Other things may change, but God and law and righteousness *never.*—D.

Vers. 60—63.—*A rift in the storm-cloud.* Human life is a season of probation. Far better to be chastised here, however severely, than to hear the sentence of doom at the last assize. Present corrections have a merciful design. Above the moral tempest calmly beams the star of mercy. To restoration repentance is needful.

I. THE SOURCE OF REPENTANCE. "I," said God, "will remember my covenant with thee." Although God may severely punish, he does not cast off, if there be a vestige of hope. Though they had forgotten God, God had not forgotten them; nor had he forgotten his covenant. Though gleams of anger were in his eye, and vengeance bared his arm, the love of his heart had not dried up. He ploughed up the field deeply, that the rain of his grace might penetrate the soil. It is pure love that originated the covenant, and pure love that maintains it.

II. THE NATURE OF TRUE REPENTANCE. "Thou shalt be ashamed." Repentance comes from reflection. Sin is the effect of slumber of mind, callousness of conscience. When the real man awakens and reflects, he is filled with shame. He sees himself in the mirror of truth, and his emotional nature is pained, wounded, abashed. He loathes himself. He is willing to give anything, to *hear* anything, if only he might undo the guilty deeds. A sense of shame is self-inflicted punishment. It is not simply remorse because the sin has been discovered. It is change of mind with respect to sin itself. It is dislike for all sin.

III. THE PROOFS OF REPENTANCE. Great humility is an evidence of repentance. The old pride is sapped and eradicated. Old prejudices and antipathies disappear. Better still, there springs up concern for others—an ardent desire to bless our rivals and our foes. Sodom and Samaria should be received as daughters. The good we obtain we long to share with the worst of men. Generous and benevolent affection is good evidence of repentance. "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways."

IV. THE EFFECTS OF REPENTANCE. Two effects are mentioned. 1. *Intimate friendship with God.* "They shall know that I am the Lord." There is meant here, not simply intellectual knowledge, but strong conviction, intimate acquaintance, familiar friendship. This knowledge will increase and ripen into life eternal. 2. *Greater self-restraint.* "Thou shalt never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame." This indicates great tenderness of conscience; yea, a sensitive dread of offending God. The more we know of God the more reverence we have for him, and the stronger becomes our desire to please him. As is our knowledge, so is our humility—ay, our self-extinction.

> "The more thy glories meet my eyes,
> The humbler I shall lie;
> Yet while I sink, my joys shall rise
> Immeasurably high."

D.

Vers. 1—15.—*A picture of human depravity and destitution, and of Divine condescension and favour.* "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations," etc. "We have here," says Hengstenberg, "one of the grandest prophecies of Ezekiel. The prophet surveys in the Spirit of God the whole of the development of Israel, the past and the future." In this development we have the following stages: The condition in which the Lord found his people; the condition to which he raised them; their shameful departures from him; his severe judgments upon them; and their restoration to his favour. Each of these developments of Israelitish history may be viewed as an emblem of man's moral condition or relations with God, or of God's dealings with man. It seems to us that it would be unwise to attempt to deal with the chapter as a whole in one homily. We shall therefore consider its chief paragraphs separately. In the section before us we have two graphic pictures.

I. A PICTURE OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY AND DESTITUTION, OR OF THE CONDITION IN WHICH THE LORD FOUND HIS PEOPLE. 1. *Their depraved moral parentage.* "Thus saith the Lord God unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." The people of Israel are here designated "Canaanites," to indicate their degraded moral character and condition. "The Amorites and the Hittites are two chief Canaanitish tribes, that elsewhere so often represent the whole of the Canaanites; the Amorites already, in Gen. xv. 16, where they specially represent the Canaanitish people in their sinfulness." Moral character and conduct are often viewed as indicative of moral parentage. "When men live according to the courses, natures, manners of others, they are styled their sons, or children." Thus the Jews are called "sons of the sorceress," etc. (Isa. lvii. 3). The Jews in the time of our Lord's ministry upon earth claimed to be "Abraham's seed. . . . They said unto him, Abraham is our father." But Jesus said unto them, "Ye are of your father the devil" (John viii. 33—44). And St. Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, called Elymas the sorcerer a "child of the devil" (Acts xiii. 10). The tendency to sin which characterizes human nature indicates sinful parentage. The doctrine of original sin has often been stated in a very objectionable manner. But there is a basis of fact underlying that doctrine. It is certain that human beings manifest in early life a proclivity to sin. The modern scientific teaching as to inherited tendencies conducts to the conclusion that we inherit a depraved moral nature. 2. *Their destitute moral condition.* "And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut," etc. (vers. 4, 5). These verses point to the condition of Israel in Egypt, where the family grew into a nation, or the nation may have said to have been born. There was nothing there to foster the moral life and health of the young nation. Nay, more, their physical condition was one of cruel oppression and bitter persecution (cf. Exod. i. 7—22). They were abhorred, afflicted, and brutally ill treated. But the verses illustrate man's spiritual condition apart from the grace of God and the provisions of that grace. Man is morally unclean as an unwashed infant, morally neglected as an uncared-for infant, left to live or die, no one taking an interest in its condition, and being completely incapable of self-help. Is not that a picture of man's spiritual state apart from the grace of God? We inherit a sinful nature. We cannot convert or sanctify ourselves, or even do anything with a view to such results without Divine influence. We cannot repent except as we are summoned and strengthened to do so from heaven. And man cannot save us if he would; for every man is a sinner, and needs salvation himself. Neither can angels save us. Their utmost wisdom, love, and might are inadequate to the difficult task. God alone has pity enough and power enough for this work. If he leaves us we must perish. If we are to be saved he must begin and carry on the gracious work. And we rejoice to know that he does not leave any people to perish without witness of himself, or without some gracious influences from him (cf. Acts xiv. 17; Rom. i. 19, 20; 1 Tim. ii. 4).

II. A PICTURE OF DIVINE CONDESCENSION AND FAVOUR, OR THE CONDITION TO WHICH THE LORD RAISED HIS PEOPLE. (Vers. 6—14.) Here, as Fairbairn observes, "everything is fragrant with the matchless grace and loving-kindness of God." 1. *God graciously regarded them in their outcast condition.* "I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted [Revised Version, 'weltering,'] in thine own blood." He looked compassionately upon the Israelites in their afflictions and sorrow in Egypt. "The Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt," etc. (Exod. iii. 7—10). He saw our race ruined by sin, and of his own free and unmerited grace he had pity upon us. We had no claim upon his compassion or assistance. By our sin we had forfeited every title to his favour. We had no grace or beauty to commend us to his regard. We were rather, as in the picture drawn by the prophet (vers. 3—6), fitted to awaken repulsion. Yet God looked upon us in mercy; and he did so of his own good pleasure. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us," etc. "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." 2. *God conferred life upon them.* "I said unto thee in thy blood, Live!" He saw the Israelites in Egypt as it were naked, abhorred, and perishing, and he designed them for life, and caused them to live, notwithstanding the cruelty of their oppressors. And it is God of his grace, through Christ Jesus and by his Word and Spirit, who quickens dead souls into life. "God being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ," etc. (Eph. ii. 4—10; cf. Col. ii. 13; John iii. 5—8). 3. *He blessed them with growth and increase.* "I caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field," etc. The explanation of this verse is in Exod. i. 7, 12. The great increase of the children of Israel excited the fears of the Egyptian monarch, and led him to oppress them; "but the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." Their growth was of God, and accorded with his great purposes concerning them. Spiritual growth in the individual is the product of Divine influences. God quickens and sustains and increases the life of the soul. Hence St. Paul prays "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man," etc. (Eph. iii. 16—19). The increase of the Church also is of him. "The Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved" (Acts ii. 47). "I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 6). 4. *He took them into union with himself.* "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee," etc. (ver. 8). The child is represented as having now arrived at womanhood. The casting of the skirt over her is an action indicative of taking her under one's protection with a view to betrothal (cf. Ruth iii. 9). And keeping up the figure, the espousals are indicated by the words, "Yea, I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, . . . and thou becamest mine." This covenant was entered into at Mount Sinai (cf. Exod. xix. 3—8; xxxiv. 27). "What grace when the Holy and Almighty One condescends to enter into covenant with so sinful and miserable a people!" And still God graciously enters into covenant with all who heartily believe on his Son Jesus Christ (cf. Heb. viii. 6—13). In this covenant we give ourselves to him as loyal subjects and servants; and in addition to many other blessings, he gives himself to us as the crowning blessing of the covenant. And if we are in this covenant, we may without presumption address him as our Father and our God (cf. John xx. 17). "The Lord is my Portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." 5. *He sumptuously clothed and adorned them.* "Then washed I thee with water; yea, I throughly washed away thy blood from thee," etc. (vers. 9—14). The washing and anointing (ver. 9) are suggested by the custom in the East of purifying the bride for her royal husband (cf. Esth. ii. 12). Israel is represented as having been thoroughly cleansed and anointed as the bride of the Lord. Then the prophet speaks of the dress and jewellery of the bride. (1) The clothing and adorning were glorious. "I clothed thee also with broidered work," etc. The reference is to the condition of the people during the reigns of David and Solomon, before the kingdom was divided, when they were at the height of prosperity and power. God clothes his people with "the beauty of holiness." They have "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit." "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation," etc. (Isa. lxi. 10; and cf. Luke xv. 22). (2) The clothing and adorning were admired. "Thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty." The renown of the Israelites and their king is mentioned in 1 Chron. xvii. 8, 21. When men are clothed with the beauties of moral excellence they awaken the admiration of the world. Men respect genuine religion when they see it embodied in human lives. (3) The clothing and adorning were of God. "It was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God." The prosperity, power, and glory of Israel came from him. And Christians have not a righteousness of their "own, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." He arrays them in glories like his own. "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." Spiritual, unfading, and eternal are the garments and glories in which God invests his people.—W. J.

Ver. 2.—*Leading sinners to a knowledge of their sins.* "Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations."

I. THAT SIN IS ESSENTIALLY VILE IN ITS CHARACTER. The sins of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were "abominations" in the sight of God. David says of the wicked, "They are corrupt, they have done abominable works;" "Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity." And Jehovah said to the Jews, "Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate!" In its own nature sin "is an evil thing and a bitter." It is a polluting thing, defiling the soul; it is a degrading thing, dishonouring the soul. It is an infraction of the order of God's universe, and is inimical to its true interests. Sin is evil "in every respect—hateful to God, hurtful to man, darkening the heavens, burdening the earth."

II. THAT SINNERS OFTEN FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN SIN. The inhabitants of Jerusalem at this time were sadly corrupted by sin, but were so oblivious to the fact that the prophet is summoned to bring them to a knowledge of their abominations. David did not recognize as his own the foul crimes which he had committed when they were set before him parabolically. It was not until the Prophet Nathan said unto him, "Thou art the man!" that he saw himself to be the sinner he really was (2 Sam. xii. 1—14). The Pharisees in the time of our Lord's ministry were really great sinners, but they regarded themselves as the excellent of the earth. We are quick to behold the mote that is in our brother's eye, but we take no notice of the beam that is in our own eye. This failure of sinners to recognize their own sin may arise: 1. *From the subtlety of sin.* Sin approaches the soul in dangerous disguises. "Were the vision of sin seen in a full light, undressed and unpainted, it were impossible, while it so appeared, that any one soul could be in love with it, but all would rather flee from it as hideous and abominable." Wickedness veils itself in the garb of what is harmless, respectable, or excellent. Avarice hides its hard and hungry features under the name of economy. Harsh censoriousness wears the cloak of honest plain-spokenness, etc. 2. *From the proneness of men to excuse sin in themselves.* Until man is brought to see and feel his sins aright, he is ready to palliate or to extenuate them. Men are cruelly indulgent to themselves in this respect. And in some cases pride and self-flattery blind men to their own offences.

III. THAT THE MINISTERS OF GOD SHOULD ENDEAVOUR TO BRING SINNERS TO A KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR SINS. To this duty Ezekiel was summoned in our text. And this is incumbent on the ministers of Jesus Christ. 1. *For the conversion of the sinners.* "Without the knowledge of sin, repentance and conversion are not to be thought of." "As a physician, when he wishes to heal a wound thoroughly, must probe it to the bottom, so a teacher, when he wishes to convert men thoroughly, must first seek to bring them to a knowledge of their sins." 2. *For the deliverance of their own souls.* (Cf. ch. iii. 17—21; xxxiii. 7—9.) 3. *For the vindication of the Law and government of God.* Sin is an outrage of his holy Law, and it should be exhibited as such. Persistence in sin calls down Divine punishment, and the sin should be set forth unto men, that they will recognize the righteousness of the punishment. If sin be not properly estimated by men, how shall the Divine dealings in the punishment of it be justified unto them? Therefore the ministers of Jesus Christ should endeavour to cause sinners to know their sins.—W. J.

Vers. 15—34.—*A picture of flagrant apostasy from God.* "But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown," etc. The prophet now passes from what God had done for his people Israel to set forth how they had requited him. He had shown how, under his fostering care, the outcast child had grown into a beautiful maiden, whom he had espoused and arrayed in robes and ornaments of beauty, until she had become renowned amongst the nations. Now he exhibits the apostasy of the people under the figure of the gross unfaithfulness of this wife to her husband, with whom she had entered into solemn covenant, and to whom she owed everything good and valuable that she possessed. Idolatry is frequently set forth in the Scriptures under the similitude of fornication or adultery (cf. Jer. iii. 20). The chief point of the comparison is perhaps this, that, as the marriage covenant is an endearing and sacred one, and the violation of it is therefore a heinous sin, so the covenant between God and his people is intimate and holy, and to violate it is to incur the darkest guilt. The wife is under the most solemn obligations not to turn aside from her husband to another man, or to allow any one to rival him in her affections. And those who have entered into covenant with God ought not to allow any person or thing to compete with him for the supreme place in their hearts. We can only view this representation of the people's apostasy "generally," as Fairbairn observes, "and with respect to its leading features; as from the very nature of the image it is impossible to be minute, without at the same time falling into indelicacy."

I. THE BASE BEGINNINGS OF THIS APOSTASY. 1. *Forgetfulness of the past.* "In all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast polluted in thy blood." The Israelites forgot the helpless and afflicted condition in which the Lord found them in Egypt, and how he had championed their cause, delivered them from their oppressors, and raised them into an independent, prosperous, and powerful nation. Had they remembered these things, the recollection would have bound them to him by the tender and tenacious ties of gratitude.

> "They remembered not the multitude of thy mercies.
> They soon forgot his works.
> They forgot God their Saviour,
> Which had done great things in Egypt."
> (Ps. cvi. 7, 13, 21.)

A lively recollection of what God has done for us, and of how much we owe to him, will prove a powerful preventive to our departing from him. 2. *Confidence in themselves and their possessions.* "Thou didst trust in thine own beauty." The things which God had enabled them to acquire—position, prosperity, power—they had abused by making them occasions of sin. They reposed in them the trust which they should have reposed in God alone. How often have men abused their prosperity in a similar manner! A man by the blessing of God succeeds in his business undertakings, and then attributes all his success to his tact, perseverance, and energy, and places his supreme confidence in those powers or in himself. How vain is such confidence (cf. Prov. xxviii. 26; Jer. ix. 23)! And another, who has prospered in his worldly affairs, places his trust in his riches. This also is vain (cf. Ps. xlix. 6, 7; lii. 7; 1 Tim. vi. 17). "He who has a high opinion of himself has no desire for grace; and the more he trusts in himself, the more quickly will he squander gifts and blessings. Self-exaltation leads from grace, just as self-knowledge leads to grace" (Schröder). 3. *Perversion of the position which they had attained through the favour of God.* "And playedst the harlot because of thy renown." The eminence which they had attained by means of his blessing they turned into an occasion of exalting themselves against him. "God made this people above all nations," says Greenhill, "in praise, in name, in honour, that they might be a holy people unto him (Deut. xxvi. 19); their renown should have encouraged them to holiness, and it was an incentive unto looseness. Solomon had great renown abroad in the nations (1 Kings iv. 31); that drew the princes to bestow their daughters upon him (1 Kings xi. 3); he had seven hundred wives, princesses; his name made way for unlawful marriages, and they made way for unlawful gods." Their prosperity and fame they thus perverted in saddest, sinfullest manner.

II. THE DREAD PROGRESS OF THIS APOSTASY. The apostasy itself consisted of the worship of idols, or the giving unto idols the homage which was due to God alone, and the formation of forbidden political alliances, or reposing in nations the confidence which should have been placed alone in God. The beginning of the apostasy seems to have been in the latter part of the reign of Solomon, when his heathen "wives turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings xi. 4—8). It entered upon another stage when the ten tribes under Jeroboam began to worship the true God by means of the images of the calves which were set up at Dan and Bethel. Afterwards the people began to adopt the vile idols of their heathen neighbours. But in the paragraph before us the chief stages of this apostasy are: 1. *The manufacture and worship of idols.* (Vers. 16—18.) 2. *The building of chambers for their idolatrous practices.* (Vers. 24, 25.) Not content with the high places, or natural heights, set apart for worship, they erected these vaulted chambers in the thoroughfares of the city. "The natural heights," says Hengstenberg, "are too far from the people hungering after idols. They wish to plant idolatry in the city thoroughfare, and so build for themselves artificial heights. We must distinguish between the thought and its clothing. The thought is that the objects of idolatry became the prime impulse of the popular life, by which is to be understood much less religious than political adultery, though both went hand-in-hand." 3. *The sacrifice of their children to Moloch.* (Vers. 20, 21.) From ch. xx. 26 it appears that they offered their firstborn to this revolting heathen deity. The god was supposed to be present in the fire, and the children who were made to pass through it were devoured by it. Aben Ezra says that "to cause to pass through" is the same as "to burn." And the Jews did this notwithstanding the most solemn and stern warnings against it. "The offender who devoted his offspring to Moloch was to be put to death by stoning; and in case the people of the land refused to inflict upon him this judgment, Jehovah would himself execute it, and cut him off from among his people (Lev. xviii. 21; xx. 2—5)." But they had become guilty even of this atrocity. The Lord calls these children whom they so cruelly sacrificed, his children. "Thou hast slain my children." They were his because he is "the Father of spirits." His also because they were born under the covenant, and bore in themselves the mark of the covenant. So these people had gone from bad to worse, until their sins were now calling loudly for vengeance. There is no standing still in sin. When man has departed from God, unless means be used and efforts be made to return unto him, he will depart ever to a greater distance; the breach between them will grow wider until it becomes a great and awful gulf. Beware of the first faint alienation of the heart from him. Stop the very beginnings of departure from him. Keep close to him in true and tender affection, and loyal and loving service.

III. THE SORE AGGRAVATIONS OF THIS APOSTASY. 1. *Their extreme readiness to depart from God.* (Vers. 25—34.) The nations did not seek after them, but they after the nations. They were eager to adopt their idols, and to enter into political alliances with them. "The treacherous and wanton dealing was all on Israel's part," says Fairbairn; "she conceded everything to them, they yielded back nothing in return to her—her wickedness was gratuitous and unrequited folly. A solemn and pregnant truth, which the Church of God should never forget. She loses all, and the world gains all, when she foolishly stoops to impair the testimony of God, or adjust the claims and services of religion to the tastes and practices of the carnal mind. A nominal advance or apparent reconciliation may possibly be made by the manœuvre; but it can be no more than nominal and apparent; the interests that really profit by such a policy are those of the flesh and the world. It is only when the Church is faithful to her testimony—when she stands in the truth of Christ, and in that truth shines forth 'bright as the sun, clear as the moon,' that she is found also, in her conflict with evil, 'terrible as an army with banners.'" 2. *Their abuse of his gifts in departing from him.* (Vers. 17—19.) "My gold and my silver . . . mine oil and mine incense . . . my meat also I gave thee,"—these things he charges them with having applied to idolatrous uses. The 'Speaker's Commentary' points out an illustration of this in its notes on ver. 33: "The picture is heightened by the contrast between one who as a prostitute receives hire for her shame, and one who as a wife is so utterly abandoned as to bestow her husband's goods to purchase her own dishonour. The conduct of Ahaz in purchasing aid from the King of Assyria with the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord (2 Kings xvi. 8) is an excellent illustration, and may perhaps be referred to in this very passage." And very often still men abuse the gifts of God to his dishonour, as in the employment of their abilities for base or unworthy purposes, the use of riches for vain or sinful objects, etc. 3. *Their resolute persistence in departing from him.* Nothing stopped them in their apostasy; or, if checked for a time, it was speedily resumed again. The bestowment of many and precious favours upon them did not bind them to the Lord. They actually made these (as we have seen) an occasion of apostasy. Nor did the infliction of chastisement effectually restrain their great and persistent unfaithfulness. Such chastisement is spoken of in ver. 27. The blessings which God had promised to his people on condition of their fidelity to the covenant, and which in former times had been so abundantly bestowed (cf. vers. 9—14), he diminished as a punishment for their sins. By their religious and political unfaithfulnesses they had been great losers "in land, and people, and influence, and splendour;" but still they were bent upon backsliding from him. Neither mercies nor judgments, rewards nor punishments, availed to secure their fidelity to the Lord their God. "My people are bent to backsliding from me." Their hearts were "fully set in them to do evil."—W. J.

Vers. 35—43.—*A picture of righteous retribution because of apostasy.* "Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filthiness was poured out," etc. The scope and meaning of this paragraph is clearly and forcibly stated in the 'Speaker's Commentary:' "The punishment of Judah is represented by the same figure as her sin. She has been portrayed as an adulteress and a murderess. She is now represented as undergoing the punishment adjudged to an adulteress and murderess. The scene is a court of justice, before which the Lord himself appears to arraign the guilty woman. There are present those who are now her lovers, and those whom she has loved and deserted (the idolatrous nations with whom Judah has had guilty intercourse), to witness, to share, or to exult in, her disgrace. In proportion to her former honour shall be her present shame. As a woman suspected of infidelity to her husband had her head uncovered by way of disgrace, so this convicted adulteress shall be stripped bare, exposed to utter shame, shall be stoned and slain, and her house shall be made desolate. Only in her utter destruction shall the wrath of the Lord, the jealous God, cease." In our text—

I. THE SINS OF WHICH THE PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM WERE GUILTY ARE STATED. These have been set forth at length in the preceding paragraph, and we have considered them here. And, indeed, all the important points in the section now before us have come under our notice in earlier portions of the writings of Ezekiel, most of them more than once; a brief consideration of them will therefore be sufficient in this place. The sins of which the people are here convicted are these. 1. *Sinful forgetfulness of their early history.* "Thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth" (ver. 43; cf. ver. 22). They forgot the low estate in which the Lord found them in Egypt, and from which he had raised them into a condition of national life, prosperity, and power. This forgetfulness involved base ingratitude. 2. *Shameful apostasy from God.* "Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered," etc. The "filthiness" of the Authorized Version should be "brass." The word is used either "for metals of all kinds, or goods and chattels generally, or money in particular. . . . It is put instead of the 'whoredoms' of ver. 15, because, according to ver. 33, these were purchased by means of presents" (Schröder). 3. *The idolatrous and cruel sacrifice of their own children.* "The blood of thy children which thou didst give unto them" (ver. 36; cf. vers. 20, 21).

II. THE SENTENCE ON ACCOUNT OF THESE SINS IS PRONOUNCED. 1. *The end of their prosperity and the destruction of their city.* "I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place," etc. (vers. 39, 41). There is unmistakable reference here to the siege of Jerusalem, and to the destruction, loss, and misery connected therewith. The people had abused their prosperity to the dishonour of God, and he would completely strip them of prosperity, deprive them of power, and leave them naked and bare as they were when the Lord first interposed for them (ver. 7). "The unfaithful use of the gifts of God inevitably brings on their loss. God cannot be mocked." 2. *Their violent death for their spiritual adultery and physical murder.* "I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. . . . They shall also bring up a company against thee," etc. (vers. 38, 40). According to the Law of Moses, adultery was to be punished with death by stoning (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxii. 24; John viii. 5); death was also the penalty of murder (Exod. xxi. 12). Such were the judgments of adulteresses and of murderers; and in the siege and capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar such judgments were inflicted upon the guilty people of that city. 3. *Their violent death in the presence of and inflicted by the nations with whom they had sinned.* (Vers. 37, 41). The "many women" of ver. 41 are the neighbouring nations. These nations should behold the downfall and degradation, the shame and misery, of the apostate people; and the Chaldeans should be the instruments for accomplishing their overthrow, into whose hands they were given by the Lord. It is often so ordered, in the providence of God, that the companions of sinners in their sins become the weapons by which they are punished for those sins. "This is the curse of sin," says Schröder, "that those with whom we have sinned make common cause with our enemies for our punishment. . . . Friends may in certain circumstances be the most painful rods in God's hand."

III. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SENTENCE IS INDICATED. "I will recompense thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord God" (ver. 43). The Revised Version is more correct: "I also will bring thy way upon thine head." Sinners "are dealt with not only as they deserved, but as they procured. It is the end which their sin, as a way, had a direct tendency to," which God will bring upon their head.

CONCLUSION. Our subject utters solemn warning against sin, especially on the part of those who have been much blessed by God; for the heinousness of sin is proportionate with the greatness of privilege, and the severity of punishment will correspond with the heinousness of sin.—W. J.

Vers. 44—52.—*A picture of comparative iniquity.* "Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use this proverb against thee, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter," etc. The following observations are suggested by this paragraph.

I. THE HEINOUSNESS OF SIN IS PROPORTIONATE TO THE POSITION AND PRIVILEGES OF THE SINNERS. "The more mercies people enjoy, the greater are their sins if they answer not those mercies." It is by the application of this principle that the people of Judah are pronounced greater sinners than they of Sodom or Samaria. Judah was immeasurably richer in moral and religious advantages than Sodom. "They had Moses and the prophets;" they had a clearer and fuller revelation of the Divine will; they had more frequent warnings and exhortations from holy prophets of the Lord; they had regular religious ordinances, and other aids to a true and righteous life, which

Sodom possessed not. The people of Judah had greater privileges than Samaria also, in having the temple of God in their midst, and in having kings of the line of David to reign over them, some of whom were eminent for their piety. Because of their grievous sins, notwithstanding their superior privileges, they are accounted more guilty than the people of Sodom and Samaria (vers. 46—48). The sins of Sodom are specified by the prophet. "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread," etc. (vers. 49, 50). Her grossest, foulest sin is not mentioned here. Before it was destroyed, Sodom had become a moral plague-spot upon the face of God's fair earth. And the sins of Samaria, or of the ten tribes, were many and dark. Yet the highly favoured people of Judah were accounted guiltier than either Sodom or Samaria, because they had committed their sins despite the greatest advantages and privileges. Their wickedness had become proverbial. It was common to say of them, "As is the mother, so is her daughter," etc. (vers. 44, 45; and cf. ver. 3). The principle with which we are dealing was clearly and explicitly stated by our Lord (Matt. xi. 20—24; Luke xii. 47, 48). Viewed in this light, how heinous are the sins of Great Britain! This land has been most richly blessed by God with civil and religious freedom, with a splendid literature, a noble ancestry, an open Bible, a weekly day of rest and religious service, abundant provision for public worship, and countless Christian ministries. And if these great advantages be not truly prized and improved, a darker, deeper guilt will be ours than that of less favoured peoples.

II. THE MORE HEINOUS SINS OF A MORE FAVOURED PEOPLE JUSTIFY THE SINS OF PERSONS OF INFERIOR PRIVILEGES. "Thou hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations which thou hast done" (ver. 51). "The justification is a comparative one: in relation to thee, Sodom and Samaria must appear as righteous." Great sins appear small when compared with greater ones. Thus professedly religious people, when they give way to sin, cause those who make no profession of religion to think less gravely, or even lightly, of sin. When religious people have a low standard of practical life and conduct, they thereby lower the standard of those who are about them. Sin in those who occupy the place of the people of God seems to excuse sin in those who occupy a lower position, and in this way affords encouragement to wickedness. Let those "who profess and call themselves Christians" take heed that they so live as not in any way or degree to justify or countenance sin in others.

III. THE GREATEST SINNERS ARE SOMETIMES MOST READY TO JUDGE OTHER SINNERS. "Thou also hast judged thy sisters" (ver. 52). "Judah had concurred from the heart in the Divine judgment on Sodom and Samaria, and exalted herself above them on this account, as the Pharisee in the Gospel." They had spoken harshly of their fellow-countrymen who were in exile, and with self-righteous assertion of their own privileges (ch. xi. 15). Yet in some respects, as we have seen, they were the greatest sinners. And still it is not the holy, but the wicked, who are most ready to condemn sin in others, and to judge others with rigorous severity. But mark the teaching of our Lord on this matter (Matt. vii. 1—5; John viii. 2—11).

IV. THE GREATEST SINNERS WILL MEET WITH THE SEVEREST PUNISHMENT. "Thou also, which hast judged thy sisters, bear thine own shame for thy sins that thou hast committed more abominable than they," etc. (ver. 52). Punishment is proportionate with guilt. Terrible were the judgments of God upon Jerusalem (cf. ch. v. 9—12; Lam. iv. 4—11). Jeremiah cries, "The punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her." "Sodom's punishment was sharp but short; Jerusalem's was sharp and long." "We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth." "The righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds."

CONCLUSION. Even the greatest sinners may obtain free and full forgiveness through the infinite mercy of God. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," etc. (Isa. lv. 6, 7).—W. J.

Vers. 60—63.—*A picture of renewed favour.* "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth," etc. There is perhaps a reference here to the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon to their own land. But it seems beyond doubt that the prophet points to the gospel covenant and its spiritual blessings. Two facts seem to us to afford conclusive proof of this. (1) That this new covenant is more fully described by Jeremiah (xxxi. 31—34); and (2) that this passage from Jeremiah is directly applied to the Christian covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews (viii. 8—12). The renewed favour of God to his people is seen not so much in temporal as in spiritual blessings.

I. THE RENEWED FAVOUR OF GOD TOWARDS HIS PEOPLE ORIGINATED WITH HIMSELF. "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." Notwithstanding their breach of the covenant, and their countless and enormous sins, God will return to them in blessing. And he will do so of his own unmerited and unsought grace. When Jesus Christ came into our world he came without any solicitation from man. "He came unto his own possessions, and his own people received him not." "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The contrast between God and the Jews in respect to the covenants shows that the existence of the new one was entirely owing to his grace. 1. They forgot him and the covenant into which they entered with him. But he says, "I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth." He does not forget the engagements into which he enters, or the promises which he makes. "If we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself." 2. They outrageously broke the covenant. "Thou hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant" (ver. 59). But the Lord says, "I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." Clearly this was not of their merit, but of his mercy. "By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, that no man should glory."

II. THE RENEWED FAVOUR OF GOD TO HIS PEOPLE AWAKENS WITHIN THEM PENITENT RECOLLECTIONS. "Then shalt thou remember thy ways, and be ashamed." This remembrance is not mere recollection, but recollection and reflection upon the things remembered. Moved by the grace of God, the Jews would recall to mind their sinful ways, and consider them, and take to themselves shame because of them. Like the psalmist—

> "I thought on my ways,
> And turned my feet unto thy testimonies," etc.
> (Ps. cxix. 59, 60.)

Like the prodigal also: "When he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare!" etc. (Luke xv. 17—12). There is no real repentance without this remembrance and consideration of our ways; again, there is no real repentance except when such remembrance and consideration lead to shame and self-reproach. Now, according to our text, it is the grace of God which produces this desirable condition of mind and heart. "Law and terrors do but harden." "The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." Unmerited kindness is like coals of fire melting the hearts of sinners. When the mercy of God is realized by man it leads to loathing of sin, and sincere sorrow, because we have been guilty thereof, and lowly love towards him.

III. THE RENEWED FAVOUR OF GOD EXPRESSED IN THE BESTOWMENT OF RICH BLESSINGS. The blessings mentioned and referred to in the text are those of the new covenant which God would make with man. "I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. . . . And I will establish my covenant with thee" (vers. 60, 62; and cf. Jer. xxxi. 31—34). 1. *These blessings are spiritual.* The knowledge of God is one of them. "And thou shalt know that I am the Lord." We have frequently read of their knowing him as a consequence of his judgments. Now we come to their knowing him as a result of his grace. This knowledge is more true and tender, more intimate and influential, than that. This is a saving acquaintance with him. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." The forgiveness of sin is another of the blessings mentioned in the text. "When I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done" (ver. 63), should be, as in the Revised Version, "When I have forgiven thee all that thou hast done." "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more" (Jer. xxxi. 34). Says Schröder, "As the covenant springs from pure mercy and faithfulness, so in its inmost essence it consists in forgiveness of sins." What a blessing this is! But the chief blessing of the covenant is not expressly mentioned by Ezekiel. God gives himself as the crowning blessing of the covenant. "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. xxxi. 33). Having him for our Portion, we have all good in him. 2. *These blessings are universal.* "Thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger." By these sisters probably Samaria and Sodom are meant (cf. ver. 46). But they must be taken, in connection with Jerusalem, as representing the world-wide extent of the blessings of the new covenant. The gospel is not for one nation or people, but for humanity, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" "He died for all;" "Who gave himself a ransom for all;" "The living God is the Saviour of all men, specially of them that believe." And our Lord sent forth his servants into all the world to preach the gospel to the whole creation. Judah is said to receive these sisters, and they are said "to be given to her for daughters, because through her they should attain to the inheritance of blessing." "Salvation is of the Jews;" "Of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh." The first Christians were Jews. The apostles who offered the blessings of the new covenant unto the Gentiles, and received those of them who believed into the Church, were Jews. 3. *These blessings are perpetual.* "I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." The first covenant was said to be "everlasting" (Gen. xvii. 7); and it was so in the sense that it led the way to and was fulfilled in this one. And this covenant shall never be abolished. With all its wealth of blessings it abides perpetually. God, the Supreme Blessing of it, is the soul's unchangeable and eternal Portion. "God is the Rock of my heart and my Portion for ever."

IV. THE RENEWED FAVOUR OF GOD PRODUCES MOST DESIRABLE EFFECTS. 1. *Sincere repentance for sin.* "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded." The repentance which consists in abhorrence of sin, and grief because we have sinned against so gracious a God and Father, and in love to him and to all goodness, is not decreased by the reception of his forgiveness and favour, but rather increased. The more we know of God and the more we enjoy of his grace, the more base and wicked will sin appear unto us. "Sanctified knowledge will produce sanctified shame, sorrow, and tears. When we apprehend God to have taken us into covenant with him, to be our God, to have done great things for us, to have promised great things to us, and to have been very good to us, then the remembrance of our wretched ways causeth a holy shame and a holy sorrow" (Greenhill). 2. *Devout submission to his will.* "And never open thy mouth any more" in murmuring, or complaint, or rebellion against him. It is the silence of trustful acquiescence in his will. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." Thus Divine grace received into the heart produces gracious results in the lives of those who receive it."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVII.

Ver. 2.—Put forth a riddle, etc. Again there is an interval of silence, till another theme is suggested to the prophet's mind and worked out elaborately. This he describes as a "riddle" (same word as the "dark speeches" of Numb. xii. 8, the "hard questions" of 1 Kings x. 1). It will task the ingenuity of his hearers or readers to interpret it, and so he subjoins (vers. 12—24) the interpretation. That interpretation enables us to fix the occasion and the date of the prophecy. It was the time when Zedekiah was seeking to strengthen himself against Nebuchadnezzar by an Egyptian alliance.

Ver. 3.—The eagle with great wings and long pinions (Revised Version)—probably the golden eagle, the largest species of the genus—stands for Nebuchadnezzar, as it does in Jer. xlviii. 40; xlix. 22. In Isa. xlvi. 11 the "ravenous bird" represents Cyrus. Possibly the eagle-head of the Assyrian god Nisroch (2 Kings xix. 37; Isa. xxxvii. 38) may have impressed the symbolism on Ezekiel's mind. A doubtful etymology gives "the great eagle" as the meaning of *Nisroch*. The divers colours indicate the variety of the nations under the king's sway (Dan. iii. 4; iv. 1). If the cedar was chosen to be the symbol of the monarchy of Judah, then it followed that Lebanon, as the special home of the cedar, should take its place in the parable. Possibly the fact that one of the stateliest palaces of Solomon was known as the "house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings vii. 2; x. 17, 21) may have made the symbolism specially suggestive. The word for highest branch is peculiar to Ezekiel (here and in ver. 22). The branch so carried off was carried into "a land of traffick" (Hebrew, LXX., and Vulgate, "a land of Canaan," the word being generalized in its meaning, as in ch. xvi. 29), *i.e.* to Babylon, as pre-eminently the merchant-city of the time. This, of course, refers to Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of Jeconiah and the more eminent citizens of Jerusalem (2 Kings xxiv. 8—15).

Ver. 5.—**The seed of the land** is Zedekiah, who was made king by Nebuchadnezzar in Jeconiah's place. The imagery of the willow (the Hebrew word occurs here only) seems suggested by Ezekiel's surroundings. No tree could stand out in greater contrast to the cedar of Lebanon than the willows which he saw growing by the waters of Babylon (Ps. cxxxvii. 2, though the word is different). The choice of the willow determined the rest of the imagery, and the fruitful field and the great or "many" (Revised Version) waters represent Judah, possibly with reference to its being in its measure a "land of brooks of waters," of "fountains and depths," of "wheat and barley and wine" (Deut. viii. 7—9; xi. 10—12). The kingdom of Zedekiah, *i.e.*, was left with sufficient elements for material prosperity. That prosperity is indicated in ver. 6 by the fact that the willow became a vine. It was of "low stature," indeed, trailing on the ground. It could not claim the greatness of an independent kingdom. Its branches turned toward the planter (ver. 6); its roots were under him. It acknowledged, that is, Nebuchadnezzar's suzerainty, and so, had things continued as they were, it might have prospered.

Ver. 7.—**The other great eagle** is, of course, Egypt, then under Apries, or Pharaoh-Hophra (Jer. xliv. 30). We note the absence of the "long pinions" and the "many colours" of the first eagle. Egypt was not so strong, nor did her sway extend over so great a variety of nations as Babylon. To that eagle the vine bent its roots, *i.e.*, as in ver. 15, Zedekiah courted the alliance of Pharaoh (Apries), and trusted in his chariots. He was to water the vine, which so turned to him from the beds of her plantation (Revised Version).

Ver. 8.—Ezekiel repeats, as justifying Nebuchadnezzar's action, that his first intention had been to leave Zedekiah under conditions which would have given his kingdom a fair measure of prosperity. The vine might have borne fruit.

Ver. 9.—The prophet, like his contemporary Jeremiah (xxxvii. 7), like his predecessor Isaiah (xxx. 1—7), is against this policy of an Egyptian alliance. The question which he asks, as the prophet of Jehovah, implies an answer in the negative. The doom of failure was written on all such projects. The he of the next question is not Nebuchadnezzar, but indefinite, like the French *on*. **For leaves of her spring**, read, with the Revised Version, *fresh-springing leaves*; or, *the leaves of her sprouting*. The Authorized Version and the Revised Version of the last clause seems to assert that Nebuchadnezzar would have an easy victory. It would not take great power or much people to pluck up such a vine from its roots. I adopt, with Keil and Hitzig, the rendering, *not with great power or much people will men be able to raise it up from its roots*; i.e. no forces of Egypt or other allies should be able to restore Judah from its ruins. Its fall was, for the time, irretrievable (comp. ver. 17).

Ver. 10.—The question, **Shall it prosper?** comes with all the emphasis of iteration. The east wind is, as elsewhere, the symbol of scorching and devastating power (ch. xix. 12; Hos. xiii. 15; Jonah iv. 8; Job xxvii. 21). **For furrows**, read *beds*, with Revised Version. In the case of the Chaldeans, who came from the east, there was a special appropriateness in the symbolism.

Vers. 12, 13.—The parable has been spoken. Ezekiel, after the pause implied in ver. 11, now becomes its interpreter. And that interpretation is to be addressed to the "rebellious house" (ch. ii. 3, 6) among whom he lived. Probably even among the exiles of Tel-Abib there were some who cherished hopes of the success of the Egyptian alliance, and of the downfall of the power of Babylon as its outcome. The tenses are better in the indefinite past—"came," "took," "brought," and so on in ver. 13. The history of Jeconiah's deportation and of Zedekiah's oath of fealty (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13) is recapitulated. He dwells specially on the fact that the mighty of the land had been carried off with Jeconiah. It was Nebuchadnezzar's policy to deprive the kingdom of all its elements of strength—to leave it "bare." Even masons, smiths, and carpenters were carried off, lest they should be used for warlike preparations (2 Kings xxiv. 16). It could not lift itself up. It was enough if "by keeping its covenant" it was allowed to stand.

Ver. 15.—**That they might give him horses.** The "chariots and horses" of Egypt seem, throughout its whole history, to have been its chief element of strength. See for the time of Moses (Exod. xiv. 7), of Solomon (1 Kings x. 28, 29), of Rehoboam (2 Chron. xii. 3), of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxi. 1; xxxvi. 9). **Shall he prosper?** What had been asked in the parable is asked also, in identical terms, in the interpretation. Ezekiel presses home the charge of perfidy as well as rebellion. Like Jeremiah, he looks on Nebuchadnezzar as reigning by a Divine right.

Ver. 16.—Ezekiel repeats the prediction of ch. xii. 13. The prison in Babylon, under the eye of the king against whom he had rebelled; this was to be the outcome of the alliance with Egypt. The prophecy was probably written when the hopes of Zedekiah and his counsellors were at their highest point, when the Chaldeans had, in fact, raised the siege in anticipation of the arrival of the Egyptian army (Jer. xxxvii. 5—11). Ezekiel, like Jeremiah (*loc. cit.*), declared that the relief would be but temporary.

Ver. 17.—**By casting up mounts, etc.**; better, with the Revised Version, *when they cast up mounts.* The words describe the strategical operations, not of the Egyptians against the Chaldeans, but of the Chaldeans, when they recovered from their first alarm, against Jerusalem (2 Kings xxv. 1; Jer. xxxix. 1). The Egyptians, Ezekiel predicts, would be powerless to prevent that second and decisive siege. In vers. 18, 19 the prophet emphasizes the fact that this would be the just punishment of Zedekiah's perfidy.

Ver. 20.—The words receive a special significance as being identical with those which Ezekiel had uttered in ch. xii. 13, with the addition that the sin against Nebuchadnezzar as the vicegerent of Jehovah, was a sin against Jehovah himself as the God of faithfulness and truth. There, in Babylon, the real character of his sin should be brought home to the conscience of the blind and captive king. What follows in ver. 21, in like manner, reproduces ch. xii. 14, 15.

Ver. 22.—From the message of deserved chastisement the prophet passes to the promise of restoration. The cedar of Israel is not dead. Jehovah would, in his own time, take the highest branch, tender and slender though it might be, the true heir of David's house, and deal with it far otherwise than the Chaldean conqueror had done. The latter had carried off the branch to the "land of traffick"—*sc.* had brought Jeconiah to Babylon. Jehovah would plant his branch upon the "mountain of the height of Israel" (Isa. ii. 2; Micah iv. 1). It was not to be as a willow in a low place, but to flourish, true to its origin as a cedar, so that "all fowl of every wing" should dwell in the shadow of its branches (comp. ch. xxxi. 3—9, where the same imagery is used of Assyria; and Matt. xiii. 32). As with like prophecies in Isa. xi. 1 and liii. 2 (where the "tender one" finds a parallel), the words paint an ideal never historically realized, but finding a partial fulfilment in Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, merging in the still unfulfilled vision of the kingdom of the Messiah and the restoration of Israel. To Ezekiel, as to other prophets, it was not given to know the times and the seasons, or even the manner of the fulfilment of his hopes; and when he uttered the words, the vision may have seemed not far off, but nigh at hand.

Ver. 24.—**All the trees of the field, etc.** As the cedar of Lebanon stands here for the royal house of David, so the other "trees" represent the surrounding nations, who are thought of as witnessing, first the strange prostration, and then the yet stranger resurrection of the house and the might of Judah and Israel. The thought, which reproduces that of 1 Sam. ii. 7, finds an echo in Luke i. 51, 52. Another echo of the words may, perhaps, be traced in the "green tree" and the "dry" of Luke xxiii. 31. Here then, also, as in ch. xvi., the utterance which begins with judgment, ends in mercy. Behind the picture of the blind, discrowned king the prophet sees that of the Divine ideal King in the fulness of his majesty and power.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 2.—*A riddle and a parable.* In the present instance the riddle and the parable are one, the riddle being expressed in the form of a parable. Both of these oblique forms of expression are characteristic of Oriental literature, and appear frequently in the pages of the Bible. Let us consider their advantages.

I. THE RIDDLE. This is not a mere puzzle to amuse; nor is it propounded to vex and perplex the listener. Unlike our idle conundrum, it has a grave purpose. 1. *To arrest attention.* Ezekiel was required to prophesy to people with blind eyes and deaf ears (ch. xii. 2). The methods of direct instruction had failed to impress his somnolent hearers. Called upon to try more rousing means, the prophet now launches into parables and riddles. Novelty of method may be desirable in the expression of old familiar truths. It is useless to preach if we have not the ears of the audience. Yet it is dangerous to shock reverence by frivolous eccentricity. There was nothing frivolous in Ezekiel's riddle,—it was grave, and even sublime; neither was there anything eccentric about it,—it followed a recognized method. 2. *To provoke thought.* While a direct statement may not be strongly grasped just because it is intelligible in a moment, an oblique phrase, which demands thought for the understanding of it, may sink the deeper into the mind. It is not only requisite that we should see the truth;

we need also to take hold of it. An easy comprehension of it does not satisfy all its demands, and we should not only think about it, but think our way into it, using our own minds. Truth that is thus held is most truly our own possession. 3. *To endure.* The riddle will be easily remembered and readily transmitted. Truth is not the private property of its discoverer nor of his first hearer. It is the heritage of all; it claims eternal remembrance. We want to make the teaching of it tell and stay.

II. THE PARABLE. Ezekiel's riddle was thrown into the form of a parable. Usually the riddle appears to have been of the character of a parable, though perhaps, as a rule, more brief and less easily interpreted than an ordinary parable; *e.g.* compare Samson's riddle with Jotham's parable (Judg. xiv. 12 and ix. 7—15). The one is curt and enigmatical; the other fuller and more easily understood. The parabolic form of speech has its own peculiar advantages. Sharing the three advantages of the riddle already discussed—*i.e. arresting attention, provoking thought*, and *enduring*—though in a milder form when the parable is simpler and less concise than the riddle, it is compensated for any apparent inferiority to the riddle in these respects by the possession of certain good points of its own. Let us consider its special mission. 1. *To take possession of the imagination.* The parable appeals to the pictorial faculty. It handles truth on its poetic rather than on its philosophical side. It is therefore realistic, for nothing is so realistic as poetry, nothing so paints upon our inward eye the things it is describing in words. Now, it is not enough that we should understand the truth in word and naked idea. We want to see it, to handle it, to feel the glow and power of its presence. 2. *To connect truth with present facts.* The parable brings heaven down to earth. When dealing with earthly things it draws them into relation with nearer objects. Thus it shows that the subjects it treats of are closely connected with us. Theology is too much discussed as though it belonged to the star Sirius. Parables remind us that it belongs to our earth. Following analogies with nature and life, they indicate links of connection between the material and the spiritual, between nature and God, and also between nature and man.

Vers. 3—10.—*The parable of the two eagles.* I. THE FIRST EAGLE AND THE CEDAR. The eagle is the King of Babylon. The cedar is the house of David. Nebuchadnezzar cut off the topmost twigs of this tree when he deported Jehoiakim and his court to Babylon. 1. *God uses powerful instruments.* The eagle is the king of birds. The one here described is of exceptional splendour, with variegated plumage (ver. 3). Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful monarch of his age, and he carried with him the glory of conquest over various nations, together with those resources which he drew from them which added to the sweep of his mighty wings of victory. Yet this awful tyrant was a puppet in the hands of the King of kings, who used him to work out deep designs of providence. 2. *Earthly greatness is no security against ruin.* The house of David was great, ancient, and glorious, like a cedar of Lebanon among the trees of the forest. No cattle of the field could pluck the topmost twigs that waved proudly in the wind. But the eagle swooped down upon them, tore them off, and bore them away to his distant eyrie, with greater ease than if they had been obscure boughs of lowly shrubs. The greatness of the house of David did not protect Jehoiakim against Nebuchadnezzar when the Babylonian monarch seized that wretched king and carried him captive to Chaldea. There is an earthly exaltation which springs from the favour of Heaven. Yet when that favour is lost, all its former glory will not save it. Let no one boast in his privileges and attainments; they are flimsy shields before the fiery darts of judgment.

II. THE SECOND EAGLE AND THE VINE. This eagle is Pharaoh of Egypt. The vine is Zedekiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar set up as king in Jerusalem in place of Jehoiachin. 1. *It is better to be fruitful than famous.* If Zedekiah had acted wisely he might have had a safe, though a humble, reign. He could no longer rule in pride, like Jehoiakim before him, as the top twig of a glorious cedar; but as a lowly young vine, feeble and small, he might bear good fruit. A humble, useful life is better than one of proud pretensions, and safer too; for the vine would not have attracted the destroying eagle if it had grown in quiet. 2. *The feeble are tempted to seek inefficient help.* The vine appealed to a second eagle. Zedekiah sought an alliance with Pharaoh. This was bad policy, for it was certain to provoke the vengeance of Babylon, and then even the might of the ancient empire of Egypt would be unequal to cope with the enraged power from the Euphrates, even if Pharaoh proved true to his alliance in the hour of need. But Zedekiah was more than politically foolish. He had lost faith in God, the one sure Protector of Israel. Men trust to policy, money, friendship, etc. But no earthly alliance will save in the hour of greatest need. 3. *Confidence in a worthless defence will lead to ruin.* The vine had better never have appealed to the second eagle. Zedekiah suffered grievously through leaning on Egypt. If we turn from our true Refuge to any earthly supports, we shall not only find them fail us; we shall also provoke wrath and judgment. Deceitful cunning will only aggravate the fate of the sinner. Zedekiah's treachery made his doom the more certain.

Ver. 10.—"*Shall it prosper?*" I. PROSPERITY IS NATURALLY SOUGHT AFTER. False ideas of prosperity may blind us as to its true nature. There is a prosperity which none need covet, a swollen worldly success that leaves the soul starved, barren, and sapless. It may be more blessed to suffer from the stimulating shocks of adversity than to be surfeited with such a false prosperity. But real prosperity is naturally and rightly desired. No one ought to be content to make shipwreck of life. We may not attain to the objects which we set before ourselves, and we may never realize any very great success in the eyes of men. But that our lives should break up in ruin is of all things most to be deplored. The question, "Shall it prosper?" is thus to be asked with natural anxiety. We may ask it in regard to (1) the soul; (2) the Church; (3) a specific enterprise.

II. PROSPERITY MAY BE EASILY MISSED. The vine in the parable did not prosper. Zedekiah's diplomacy was a failure. Many men make shipwreck of life. Churches sink into deadness. The inquiry should go back to the possible causes of failure. 1. *A false aim.* Zedekiah thought only of his own throne. He did not give evidence of the genuine patriotism which would have preferred the welfare of the nation to his own safety. Selfishness may win worldly success. But it is certain to starve the roots of soul-prosperity. 2. *A false trust.* Zedekiah trusted to Pharaoh instead of God. If we are looking for prosperity in any region to the neglect of our trust in God, we are courting failure, for with him are the issues of life. 3. *A false character.* Zedekiah not only leaned upon a broken reed in trusting to Egypt; he acted treacherously in so doing. Deceit is fatal to the soul. Fraud never secures true prosperity, though it may win earthly pelf.

III. PROSPERITY NEED NOT BE MISSED. Here, again, we must bear in mind the nature of true prosperity. We cannot all be rich or successful in earthly enterprises. But no soul need be wrecked, for it is within the power of all to attain to a life which shall be reckoned successful in the sight of God. We should see to it that we have the secret of this prosperity. 1. *Living for God.* This will give us a right aim. The soul that lives for self, for the world, for any lower aim, is running for the rocks. But no one who truly lives for God can utterly fail. 2. *Trusting in God.* It is not easy to pursue this high aim; indeed, it is impossible to do so without the aid of Divine grace. The life of faith is the only perfectly prosperous life. The heroes of faith whose fame is celebrated in Heb. xi. were all of them truly successful, though many of them suffered and some died as martyrs.

IV. PROSPERITY IS WORTH INQUIRING ABOUT. Ezekiel's question is pertinent. Everything else may look fair, but if this vital question receives a negative reply, all the other points of excellence count for nothing, or even tell against us in mockery of the one fatal flaw. The life may be comfortable; the Church may be sound and orthodox, or popular and attractive; the plan of work may be clever and original. But what is the use of all these pleasant features if they are to end in failure?

Vers. 18, 19.—*The broken covenant.* In turning to Egypt for protection Zedekiah had broken faith with Nebuchadnezzar; but he had done worse, for he had broken the covenant between God and the house of David.

I. UNFAITHFULNESS TO MAN IS UNFAITHFULNESS TO GOD. All sin against man is also sin against God. The second table of commandments lies upon the first, and a breach of the one involves a breach of the other. David confesses that he had sinned against God, and God only (Ps. li. 4), though his crime was directly committed against

Uriah the Hittite. The penitent prodigal charges himself with having sinned against heaven as well as before his father (Luke xv. 18). God enters into all earthly arrangements. The oath is a direct call upon God to do this; but without any such solemn appeal God cannot but take note of all we say and do, and as the Guardian of truth and justice he will consider any earthly unfaithfulness as wrong against himself.

II. THOSE WHO ARE PLEDGED TO THE SERVICE OF GOD ARE ESPECIALLY UNFAITHFUL TO HIM WHEN THEY ARE UNFAITHFUL TO THEIR FELLOW-MEN. Zedekiah was the king of a covenant nation, and his throne was bound by God's solemn covenant with David. He was, therefore, in an especial sense a servant of God. If the servant behaves ill in the world his Master must take note of the fact. It is a wrong against the Master, who is dishonoured by his shameful conduct. When a professedly Christian man shows a lack of integrity before the world, his sin is intensified by contrast with his high profession. It is bad for the common person to be faithless, but when a knight of honoured title shows the same failure of character, he brings disgrace upon his order. If one who stands before men as a Christian proves himself to be dishonourable in business, he injures the holy Name of his Master, and he breaks faith with the God whom he has promised to serve.

III. UNFAITHFULNESS TO A COVENANT WITH GOD IS A HEINOUS SIN. The Jews were peculiarly privileged; therefore their sin was especially guilty. They were bound to fidelity by exceptional pledges; their disloyalty was, therefore, the more culpable. Christians now stand in the ancient position of the Jews. 1. *Christians are peculiarly privileged.* They not only receive the general mercies of God which all men may share. They are partakers of his choicest covenant blessings. Jesus Christ, who has pledged the new covenant in his blood, has brought with it the highest blessings. For Christians to fall into sin is doubly guilty. 2. *Christians are especially pledged.* If we take the Christian name we incur the Christian obligations. The vows of God are then upon us. We are pledged to loyalty to Christ. It is no common sin to break vows of Christian service. The prophet called this sin in Israel adultery. It carries the shame and guilt of that outrage on honour.

Vers. 22, 23.—*Christ, the new Cedar.* After words of darkness and ruin, there appears the wonderful Messianic prophecy of restoration and future blessings. Sometimes this prophecy is expressed in general terms; but here the personal Messiah is distinctly predicted under the image of a shoot taken from the fallen cedar.

I. THE PLANTING OF THE NEW CEDAR. 1. *It is a cutting from the old cedar.* That proud and once venerable tree has been cruelly torn by the fierce eagle. One of its topmost twigs has been carried away, for Jehoiachin has been taken to Babylon. But another shoot from the same tree is destined to a glorious future. Christ is of the stock of David. He is called God's Servant, "the Branch" (Zech. iii. 8). The people hailed Jesus as the "Son of David" (Matt. xx. 30). Christ comes as a King, and he comes to fulfil God's ancient promises to David. He unites the present to the past, and accomplishes in himself what the throne of David had failed to attain. 2. *It appears as a slender twig.* It was said of the Christ, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground" (Isa. liii. 2). Jesus entered the world in the lowly estate of the infant Child of a poor woman, and his earthly life was one of humiliation and slight visible achievements. 3. *It is planted on a mountain.* (1) *At Zion.* Christ appears on the holy hill of Zion. He was welcomed with hosannahs as he went up to Jerusalem. His truth first shone out of Judaism, and for the benefit of the people of Zion. (2) *In exaltation.* Christ was exalted by God, although he presented a humble appearance to men. (3) *In a conspicuous place.* Christ appeared openly before men. His gospel is for the world.

II. THE GROWTH OF THE NEW CEDAR. 1. *It is to grow in size.* It shall bring forth boughs. The cutting becomes a cedar tree. The mustard seed grows into a great tree. Christ not only grew in stature, wisdom, and grace as a Child (Luke ii. 14). He grew in power afterwards, being made perfect by the things that he suffered (Heb. v. 8, 9), and being exalted to the right hand of God on account of his great self-sacrifice at the cross. Christ continues to grow in the extension of his kingdom, in the progress of the Church, which is his body. 2. *It is to be fruitful.* "And bear fruit." This cedar is to share the merits of the vine. Great as the monarch of Lebanon is, it is to be fruitful as the tender plants of the vineyard. Christ is not only great and exalted, and ever growing in the power of his kingdom. He gives out grace. His fruit is for the healing of the nations. He is the Bread of life, and his people feed upon him. Christianity is not merely a big success, like Mohammedanism. It is a blessing to the world as beneficent as it is victorious. The great Oriental monarchies were destructive, bringing a blast from the desert over the countries they conquered. The kingdom of heaven is healthful and fertilizing, promoting goodness, enterprise, civilization. We do not simply admire a great Lord in his solitary grandeur, like some awful, barren, Alpine peak. We are grateful to One who is as a fruitful tree. 3. *It is to afford shelter.* The birds are to roost in its branches, and take refuge from the storm under its foliage. So was it to be with the mustard tree (Matt. xiii. 31). (1) Christ is a *Refuge.* (2) His shelter is *for all* who need him, as under the cedar "shall dwell all fowl of every wing."

Ver. 24.—*The great reversal.* The great tree is to be cast down and withered, while the lowly growth is to be planted on high, and is to flourish. This was true of Zedekiah and Christ, as of Saul the king and David the shepherd. It is recognized in the *Magnificat* (Luke i. 52); for the lowly Mary of *Nazareth* is honoured, when the great families of Jerusalem are slighted. The principle that it illustrates is pointed out by Christ, who tells us not only the general truth that "the first shall be last, and the last first," but also its moral justification. "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. xxiii. 12).

I. THE FACT OF THE GREAT REVERSAL. 1. *The humiliation of the great.* This takes two forms. (1) *Lowered rank.* The great cedar is to be cast down. Shame follows honour. (2) *Exhausted resources.* The green tree is dried up. Earthly prosperity is followed by misery, the fulness of resources by penury. 2. *The exaltation of the low.* This also takes two forms, corresponding to the humiliation. (1) *Higher rank.* The low tree is exalted, and the twig becomes a mighty cedar. So the lowly Jesus becomes the great Christ, and the humble servant of God is raised to heavenly glory. (2) *Improved condition.* The dry tree flourishes. The once depressed good cause lifts up its head and becomes prosperous. This was seen in the growth and success of early Christianity after the shame of the cross, and the consequent depression of the earthly state of Christ's disciples. Jesus Christ predicted a similar great reversal in the future judgment of the world.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE GREAT REVERSAL. 1. *It is attributed to God.* He it is who makes great, and he also makes low. The most lofty rank is not above the reach of his terrible hand of justice; the lowest estate is not beneath his condescension. The great sweep of providence embraces all men. 2. *It is conditioned by human character.* God is not capricious. He does not grudge prosperity to his children. There is no Nemesis threatening human success apart from that of justice against wrong-doing. Innocent prosperity is not regarded with disfavour by God. The selfish envy with which the unfortunate are tempted to pursue their more happy brethren can find no justification in the ways of God. On the other hand, present misfortune is not in itself a ground for future favour, though it may be a plea for simple pity and needful mercy. The high are not cast down just because they are high, nor are the low exalted solely because they are low. Christ has given us the secret of the great reversal in the passage already quoted, viz. humiliation is to be the punishment of self-seeking, and exaltation is to be the reward of self-sacrifice. That is the great lesson which St. Paul draws from the cross of Christ (Phil. ii. 4—11).

III. THE RECOGNITION OF THE GREAT REVERSAL. "All the trees of the field shall know," etc. God's providential judgment is public; so will the great judgment be. 1. The *shame* of the fall of the great cannot be hidden. High reputations have been trampled in the mire. 2. The *fame* of the exaltation of the low will not be kept secret. 3. These facts contain *warning lessons* for the proud and self-seeking, and *encouragement* for the humble and unselfish. They are meant to be noted. 4. They glorify God, who thus shows himself just and good, and mighty against the strong.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Ver. 4.—"*A city of merchants.*" An apt designation this of Babylon the great, the very centre and emporium of commerce in the East. The deportation of the chief men among the Jews from their own land to Mesopotamia is pictorially described under the similitude of the highest branch of the cedar of Lebanon carried by the great Assyrian eagle away Eastward "into a land of traffic" and set in "a city of merchants." The description of Babylon is applicable to the great centres of population in our own and other lands, which serve both to concentrate and to diffuse the products which constitute so large a part of the wealth of the world, and which minister to human convenience and luxury. As an important factor in civilization, such cities should be considered in the light of reflection and religion.

I. COMMERCIAL CITIES ARE AN EXPRESSION OF A DEEP-SEATED TENDENCY OF HUMAN NATURE. There are, indeed, impulses which estrange and isolate men; but there are others which draw them together. We are by nature social; we have natural sympathies; we depend one upon another; we only live intellectually and morally in virtue of our mutual intercourse. Not only so; men find their interest and pleasure in close associations of various kinds. It is to their mutual advantage to gather together for the interchange of services. Thus it is in accordance with laws imposed upon our constitution by the Maker of all that men gather together in cities. In such populous centres the busy and active, the laborious and the influential, find scope for the exercise of their powers. Craftsmen and tradespeople, the bees of the social hive, spend in town life almost the whole of their earthly existence. And even those whose vocation is more distinctively intellectual, and who prefer retirement and quiet, still do not allow themselves to be cut off from the busy haunts of men; but ever and anon plunge, if but for a brief season, into the rapid, whirling tide of humanity that sweeps through their country's capital.

II. COMMERCIAL CITIES ARE THE SCENE OF VERY VARIED EXPERIENCES AND OF REMARKABLE FRICTION OF MIND WITH MIND. As compared with those engaged in rural pursuits, the dwellers in cities are quick and enterprising. They are brought more frequently into contact with one another, and each man meets daily a far richer variety of character. They are more ready to take in new ideas and to form new habits. In cities there are great contrasts. The life of the farm labourer and that of the country gentleman are not so contrasted as the life of the artisan and that of the merchant. In cities wealth and luxury are side by side with poverty and wretchedness. The poor have fewer to care for them, and the rich have fewer natural claims and responsibilities. There is a rush and scramble for wealth and position, which renders a great city the natural theme of the cynic's sneer and the satirist's invective. Yet beneath all this there is much in city life which cannot but be regarded with interest and admiration; and the contempt which is felt for townspeople is often superficial prejudice.

III. COMMERCIAL CITIES ABOUND WITH TEMPTATIONS TO SIN. There is a bad as well as a good side to city life. In the race for riches there are many opportunities for theft, peculation, embezzlement, and forgery, and the widespread desire for rapid enrichment furnishes motives to which too many sooner or later yield. In a vast population provision is made for amusement and excitement, and for vicious gratification, and in this whirlpool multitudes of the young and heedless and pleasure-seeking go down, never to emerge. There is in great cities a possibility of concealment, by which many are encouraged to form habits of self-indulgence and dissipation, from which they might in more favourable circumstances have been restrained by the gentle pressure of home influence and wholesome public opinion. No wonder that, when parents send a son to the metropolis to earn a living or to seek a fortune, their minds are distressed and anxious at the thought of the manifold temptations to which the child of many prayers is to be exposed.

IV. COMMERCIAL CITIES ARE THE CENTRES AND SOURCES OF GREAT INFLUENCE FOR BOTH GOOD AND EVIL. A great capital, the seat of government, of literature, of manufacture, of commerce, is often compared to the heart in the body, whence the streams of life flow constantly and regularly to reach the remotest extremity. In the great monarchies, empires, and republics of the world, how great a part has been played by the cities in which wealth and power have been concentrated, and by which national policy has been so largely shaped! How could the history of mankind be written without reference to Memphis, to Nineveh, to Babylon, to Rome, to Constantinople, to Paris, to London? Intelligence and wealth, luxury and vice, patriotism and public spirit, law and religion, spread from the great centres of population, industry, and prosperity, and affect the remotest regions.

V. COMMERCIAL CITIES AFFORD ESPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKS OF BENEVOLENCE AND EVANGELIZATION. They abound in enterprise and public spirit, and these may be employed as truly in the enlightenment and improvement of men as in the acquisition of wealth. They abound in population, and furnish persons of every grade of natural and acquired qualification for the several departments of Christian usefulness. They abound in wealth; and material means are necessary for the conduct of educational, philanthropic, and missionary plans. They have abundant means of communicating with localities near and far, which it may be desired to reach and affect for good; from them roads radiate to every part of the land, and ships sail to every port. These and other circumstances lead to the belief that our great cities will become in the future, even more than in the past, centres and ministers of blessing to mankind.—T.

Vers. 5, 6.—*Prosperity in adversity.* In figurative languge Ezekiel describes the position of the remnant permitted by the monarch of Babylon to remain in the land of their fathers, and to pursue their industries in peace under their own rulers, enjoying the protection of the Eastern power. The lowly vine is suffered by the mighty eagle to take root in the soil, to spread, and to bear fruit, unmolested and in a measure prosperous. The prophet is aware of the foolish and treacherous conduct of his countrymen, who, instead of accepting and acquiescing in their lot, are intriguing with the neighbouring state on the south, hoping that Egypt may come to their aid and deliver them from subjection to Babylon. A more false and foolish policy the helpless remnant could not have adopted; and it was a policy Jehovah, the King of nations, did not suffer to be successful. Even in their political adversity it was open to them to enjoy some measure of peace and prosperity. Their plotting was against their own interests, their own well-being.

I. A NATION'S HUMILIATION IS PERMITTED BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE. God raiseth up one, and setteth down another. It is a foolish and superficial view of political affairs which they take who attribute the rise and fall of nations to chance and accident. The Lord reigneth. There is wisdom and righteousness in his government of the world.

II. NATIONAL HUMILIATION SHOULD BE REGARDED AS A PROBATION AND A DISCIPLINE FOR BRIGHTER DAYS. They who see the hand of God in what happens to them will not be slow to believe that there is a *purpose* in human experience, and that this principle applies to communities as well as to individuals. There are lessons to be learnt in adversity which prosperity cannot teach. Schooled in the "waste, howling wilderness," Israel was made strong to enter and to possess the land of promise. The same principle has operated in the history of our own and of other nations.

III. THE RELATIVE PROSPERITY WHICH IS POSSIBLE EVEN IN HUMILIATION MAY BE CHECKED AND DESTROYED BY SELFISHNESS AND TREACHERY. It was the policy of the remnant patiently to wait for better times; and it was their duty to observe the covenant into which they had entered with Babylon. The discontented vine which sought other patronage was to be plucked up and to wither. Increase of prosperity should not be sought by unlawful and forbidden means.

IV. SUBMISSION AND PATIENT IMPROVEMENT OF ADVANTAGES MAY BE THE MEANS OF NATIONAL GOOD. The subject sons of Abraham might not be eminent and majestic as the cedar of Lebanon. But they might be as the fruitful vine, planted in a well-placed and well guarded vineyard, which bears abundance of fruit, and does not enjoy its advantages and opportunities in vain.—T.

Vers. 11—21.—*The sacredness of treaties.* The Old Testament abounds in illustrations of the bearing of religion upon national and corporate life. In this passage of prophecy Ezekiel rebukes his countrymen for their discontent under the Assyrian rule, and for their treacherous intrigues with Egypt. Speaking in the name of the King of kings, he upbraids them for deliberate infraction of a covenant which they were bound to observe. He shows them that political action may be sinful, and that, when such is the case, the Divine Ruler will not suffer it to go unpunished.

I. THE JUSTICE OF GOD IS DISCERNIBLE IN NATIONAL CALAMITIES. This was most evident in the case of Judah and Israel, who by their defection and apostasy incurred the righteous displeasure of the Almighty Ruler, and brought upon themselves the judgment beneath which, in the time of Ezekiel, they were smarting. The King of Babylon had come to Jerusalem, had taken the king thereof and the princes thereof, and had led them with him to Babylon; he had taken of the king's seed, and had established him in authority over the remnant in the land, that the kingdom, though base, might stand. In all this the righteous hand of God was visible to every observant and reflecting mind.

II. THE MERCY OF GOD IS DISCERNIBLE IN THE COVENANT BETWEEN THE CONQUERORS AND THE CONQUERED. Judah would have met with the fate she deserved had she been treated as an ordinary subject province. But God's providence ordered matters otherwise. The King of Babylon was disposed to deal favourably with the conquered sons of Judah. He made a covenant with Zedekiah, and took an oath of him. Thus some semblance of self-government was left with the vanquished. Although their chiefs were carried captive, those who were permitted to remain did so under the sovereignty of a member of the royal house. We are taught to see in this arrangement an evidence of the favour and forbearance of the Most High.

III. THE SANCTION OF GOD RESTS UPON NATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS SOLEMNLY UNDERTAKEN AND RATIFIED. An oath is an appeal to God, and he will not hold him guiltless that taketh his Name in vain. A nation may appeal to Heaven, as may an individual. Peoples come voluntarily into certain relations with each other in the great community of mankind. As surely as there is an Almighty Ruler who sways a righteous sceptre over the nations, so surely does sacredness attach to those obligations which nations take upon themselves with regard to one another. They are not indifferent and trivial matters, but matters with which the moral life of nations is bound up.

IV. THE DISPLEASURE OF GOD IS UPON THOSE WHO VIOLATE SOLEMN TREATIES. In language of truly prophetic indignation, the prophet upbraids the king and those who acted with him in secretly rebelling against the court of Babylon, to whose favour they owed whatever national existence was left to them, and with whom they had entered into sacred and binding treaty. "Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?" The Eternal regarded this conduct as a wrong, not so much to Babylon, as to himself. "*Mine* oath he hath despised; *my* covenant he hath broken." "He hath trespassed against *me*." It is to be feared that this is a consideration which never enters into the minds of some rulers and statesmen; they think of the effect of their conduct upon the great and mighty of this world, but they do not ask themselves how their falsehood and treachery are regarded by him who rules not in heaven only, but on the earth.

V. THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD WILL OVERTAKE THOSE WHO REGARD INTEREST AND EXPEDIENCY RATHER THAN PRINCIPLE AND PROMISES. It was foretold that Judah should gain nothing by her deceptive and base conduct. Pharaoh should not deliver the people with his mighty army. Judah's conduct should be recompensed by Divine interposition; the king who had rebelled should die in the midst of Babylon, and should not escape; the fugitives should fall by the sword, and they that remained should be scattered toward all winds. The lesson is one of universal import. Be they high or low, men who violate the compacts and disregard the engagements into which they have voluntarily and deliberately entered, shall not be unpunished, shall not escape the righteous judgments of the Judge of all the earth.—T.

Vers. 22, 23.—*The goodly cedar.* These verses contain a prophecy which can scarcely be deemed susceptible of an interpretation which should refer it to the establishment of the throne of any human, earthly sovereign. It is usually regarded as pointing on to the advent of the Messiah. This hope sprang up with irresistible power in the heart of Israel during the period of depression through which the people passed as a judgment for their defection, rebellion, and idolatry. The less of light the present afforded, the more did the captives and the conquered strain their eyes looking into the dim future. There were those who, like Isaiah and Ezekiel, were inspired to raise the courage and hopes of their countrymen by predicting the coming of a Divine Deliverer who should be raised up as a horn of salvation in the house of his father David.

I. CHRIST'S ORIGIN FROM A DESPISED AND OPPRESSED, YET FROM A ROYAL, STOCK. The members of the royal house of David were, in the lifetime of Ezekiel, reduced to comparative feebleness and obscurity. Either in Eastern exile or in the half-deserted land of their fathers' splendour, they were a deserted and dejected race. Yet from them—from the highest branch of the high cedar—Christ according to the flesh was to come.

II. CHRIST'S SELECTION AND APPOINTMENT THE TOKEN OF GOD'S FAVOUR TO HIS PEOPLE. The Messiah was "the Lord's Christ," and was set to be "a Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the Glory of God's people Israel." The temporal sovereignty might be lost, but a spiritual sovereignty should be established.

III. CHRIST'S EXALTATION, EMINENCE, AND GLORY. The twig was to be planted upon "a high mountain and eminent"—in "the mountain of the height of Israel." The Son of God was indeed "a Plant of renown." Unto him was given a Name above every name, a kingdom ruling over all. He has become, and has remained for long centuries, the one great central Figure in the history of mankind. His kingdom is vaster and more glorious than the empire of Rome or of England—a kingdom over human hearts, over human society, over the moral life of man.

IV. CHRIST'S OFFICE AS THE SHELTER OF ALL THE NATIONS, THE PROVISION FOR ALL THEIR SPIRITUAL NEED. The goodly tree is to "bear fruit," and "under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing." This metaphorical and poetical language portrays alike the extent and beneficence of the Saviour's spiritual reign on earth and over the children of men. His influence ever grows. By his bounty myriads are provided with spiritual food. Beneath his loving care men of every race find peace and protection, safety and life immortal.—T.

Ver. 24.—*The sovereignty of the Almighty Ruler.* The Bible abounds in paradox; and this for the simple reason that God does not judge and act as men judge and act. Man looketh upon the outward appearance, whereas God looks upon the heart. In many instances in Scripture history we find the younger preferred to the elder, the insignificant to the imposing. And God deals thus, not only with individuals, but with nations. He raiseth up one, and layeth low another. In the text this principle is apparent in his treatment of Israel. The captives should be restored. Earthly sovereignty might pass away from the house of David, but the Lord and King of men was intended to spring, and did spring, from a stock which seemed dry and dead. The great nations of the East, once so splendid and powerful, have, with their monarchies, passed away. But from Judah sprang the Son of man, who is appointed to reign over the race which he redeemed from sin unto God.

I. DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS TO BE RECOGNIZED IN THE ELEVATION AND DEPRESSION OF THE NATIONS. The changes which interest, amaze, and perplex the student of human history are not accidental; they are wrought by laws imposed by the Divine Creator and Ruler of all the earth.

II. DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS ESPECIALLY OBSERVABLE IN THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF HUMAN EXPECTATIONS AND THE OVERTURNING OF HUMAN PLANS. It is indeed a common proverb, "Nothing is certain but the unexpected." The fortunes of nations are beyond our prediction. Men admire the high tree; and it is brought low. They despise the low tree; and it is exalted. They predict and expect great things of the green tree; and it is dried up. They account the dry tree as fit only for burning; and lo! it flourishes.

III. DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS BY NO MEANS DIRECTED BY UNREASONING CAPRICE. The purposes of God may be hidden from us; but we may be assured that they are all inspired and controlled by infinite reason and flawless righteousness. Nothing occurs among the nations which the Omnipotent does not foresee and permit, which he will not overrule for his glory.

IV. DIVINE PROVIDENCE SO ORDERS THE CHANGES AMONG THE NATIONS THAT HONOUR

MAY BE TAKEN FROM MAN AND MAY BE ATTRIBUTED TO GOD HIMSELF. He will be glorified by the work of his own hands; and will not give his honour to another. Universal history, when complete, shall be a full and manifest witness to the wisdom and to the benevolence of God.—T.

Vers. 1—21.—*The parable of the vine.* Sin of every sort has a baneful power of blinding the mind of the transgressor. The thief does not perceive the criminality of his act. He complains only of the law which is so severe. The drunkard does not perceive the culpability of his course. May he not order his life as he pleases? So is it in every case—even in the case of secret sin. The moral sense is blinded, infatuated, indurated. In all such instances some ingenious method is required to convince the judgment of its wrong-doing. This can often be done by means of a parable. The persons addressed perceive the incongruity or the folly set forth in the picture, before they perceive that it applies to themselves—condemn their own conduct. This is Ezekiel's purpose in this chapter.

I. THE YOUNG SHOOT PLANTED. In this chapter we have both parable and interpretation; hence there is no scope for conjecture touching the meaning. The tender twig is said to have been plucked from a cedar in Lebanon. For what Lebanon was to Palestine in natural fertility and glory, Jerusalem was in political eminence. What the cedar is among trees, royal princes are among the population. The most promising young men of the royal house had been transplanted to Babylon (see Dan. i. 1, 2). Every endeavour was made to train them for usefulness and eminence.

II. A FERTILE SITUATION. It was planted in "a fruitful field"—placed "by great waters." All that could minister to the growth of the tree was provided. The outward advantages conferred upon Israel were exceptionally favourable. God had dealt with them as he had not dealt with any other nation. Even when the wave of invasion swept over them, he did not allow it at the first to overthrow them completely. The conqueror still made terms with them, which, if honourably maintained on their part, might have led to a recovery of independence and honour. The God of heaven was still their Friend, and it was in his heart to show them every possible favour. No enemy was so formidable as their own selves.

III. ROBUST GROWTH. "It grew and became a spreading vine." "It brought forth branches, and shot forth sprigs." It had within itself abundance of life. Interpreted politically, this must mean that Israel had statesmen and warriors competent for the administration of her national affairs. She had men of intellectual gifts—far-sighted prophets—young men of courage and energy. As a nation, Israel had not sunk into the weakness and decrepitude of old age. It was not from any process of natural decay that calamity had overtaken her. The secret of her downfall must be sought in her moral delinquencies—in her want of loyalty to God.

IV. HER INDEBTEDNESS. For this fresh trial of her integrity and fruitfulness, the King of Israel was under obligation to the King of Babylon, here symbolized by the first eagle. Israel had acknowledged this obligation. It had become a matter of international treaty and compact. That Israel's nationality and existence had not, at once, been terminated by the Eastern conqueror was due solely to his clemency. The defeated kingdom had allotted to it another lease of existence, another chance of meriting renown. "It was planted in a good soil, by great waters," and the enjoyment of this privilege was a pure favour. Hence arose a new and distinct obligation—an obligation admitted and defined.

V. FLAGRANT TREACHERY. It is not consistent with the rules of literary conposition to speak of a vine as guilty of treachery. But a teacher of religion is more concerned with the substance of his communication than with the form. If only Ezekiel could bring home to Israel's conscience the greatness of her sin he would easily forgive himself mere literary blemish. Earthly metaphors were incompetent to express all the truth. The violation of a positive covenant was a flagrant offence. We can conceive of none greater, especially as it was a covenant made in the name of God. And it was as foolish as it was flagrant. Did he suppose that Nebuchadnezzar would not resent the insult and avenge his outraged honour? Wrong-doing is always bad policy, as inexpedient as immoral. If man cannot trust the oath and compact of a fellow-man, all the bands of society would be loosed, and this globe would be a perpetual scene of anarchy, war, and misery. Mere might would always reign, and violence would be the only sceptre.

VI. Divine indignation. God himself appears upon the scene, and arms himself against the offender. Since the King of Israel had sworn, in God's name, to observe the covenant, the honour of God was involved. Therefore he will vindicate his own majesty. "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." As the interests of a nation are greater than those of a private person, so the violation of a national compact is a sin of blackest hue. It was not simply his own pleasure and advantage Zedekiah was imperilling, but the interests and the lives of all his subjects. Therefore God himself was constrained to leave his secret habitation, and appear as the Avenger of crime.

VII. Complete destruction. "All his fugitives with all his bands shall fall by the sword, and they that remain shall be scattered toward all winds." A series of lesser chastisements had been employed, but had proved unavailing to subdue the pride of Israel. Loss, defeat, public humiliation, dismemberment of empire, had in succession been tried. But the medicine had not taken effect. A more drastic measure must now be employed. The kindness, patience, and long-suffering of God are signally displayed; and it ought to impress our hearts most deeply to observe with what reluctance he unsheaths the avenging sword. But Justice must have her due. Our God cannot be trifled with, for he is Judge of all.—D.

Vers. 22—24.—*Spring-time after winter.* After a storm comes a calm. It is a joy for God to turn from "his strange work" of vengeance to his ordinary path of benevolence. Although he is compelled to cut down the barren tree, he allows life to spring again from the root. His course of destruction is only temporary, and beyond it purposes of kindness bud and blossom. The cloud that hides his permanent design shall presently pass, and his Name shall be enblazoned in universal renown. As a word from him started into being the material globes, so a word from him shall "create new heavens and a new earth." The promised good is imaged in a prosperous tree.

I. A tender shoot planted. "I will take the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it." This is but a variation of Isaiah's prediction that a rod should spring out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch spring from his root. As the cedar was the most renowned among their trees, so the dynasty of David was the most illustrious of their princely families. Of this ancestral tree should the Messiah spring. Commencements are always full of interest. They are pregnant with hope. The appearance of a new child awakens the imagination; much more the opening of a new epoch, the founding of a new kingdom. In this case the interest is immeasurably enhanced because God himself is the immediate Actor. "I, saith Jehovah, I will do it."

II. The garden-plot chosen. "In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it." Mountains are not the best localities in which to plant trees. They flourish better if rooted in shady valleys or on alluvial plains. But, inasmuch as the reference here is to the cedars of Lebanon, it is seemly that a mountain locality should be chosen. Still more is this appropriate when we consider that the language is metaphorical, and carries a spiritual meaning. The mountain here points to Zion—the cradle of the Messianic kingdom. "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." We are not to separate between this predicted king and his matchless kingdom. The Church "is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." In Jerusalem this new empire was founded; from the literal Mount Zion the first heralds and ambassadors went forth. And the Church is a moral elevation. It stands above the common level of human life. It holds a conspicuous place in the earth. Still is it true that "the Lord is King in Zion."

III. Its growth and beauty. "It shall bring forth boughs . . . and be a goodly cedar." From a small beginning it shall steadily develop and increase. Nature is prolific in growth, especially in favoured places; but this growth shall transcend nature—it shall awaken on all sides surprise and admiration. The fulfilment has been equal to the promise. From a feeble and despised beginning it has become already a splendid empire. It has sent its boughs into every land; and, like the drooping branches of the banyan tree, these have taken root and commenced a new life. It has sent its plastic influence into every department and province of human life. It is symmetrical in its proportions, graceful in outline, replete with beauty—"a goodly cedar."

IV. ITS FRUITFULNESS. It shall "bear fruit." It is said of the tree of life, seen in the Apocalyptic vision, that it bore twelve manner of "fruits, and yielded her fruit each month." Of this goodly tree it may with truth be said that it yields an infinite variety of fruits. It would be difficult to enumerate them. Knowledge, wisdom, pardon, hope, joy, peace, gentleness, meekness, temperance, forbearance, strength, love, conquest over sin, victory over death,—these are a few of the fruits gathered from this generous tree. As years roll on, the productiveness of this tree, instead of diminishing, increases. There is no human want that cannot here find a suitable supply.

V. ITS WORLD-WIDE USEFULNESS. "Under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing." This description is parallel to the language of our Lord himself, when he likened his kingdom to a grain of mustard seed, which, having sprung into a tree, all the fowls of the heavens lodge in the branches thereof. Under the sceptre of King Jesus every useful thing is sheltered—childhood is protected, womanhood is honoured, good legislation spreads, commerce prospers, art and science grow, every beneficent institution is nurtured. Beneath the ægis of this gracious Monarch human life is enhanced in value, lands are recovered from desolation, Music learns to tune her lyre, international concord abounds. The world of man is gradually revolutionized and beautified.

VI. THE CERTAINTY OF THE EVENT. "I the Lord have spoken and have done it." God's word is equivalent to a deed; his promise is equal to a performance. With him a volition is omnipotent; therefore he speaks of things that are not as though they were. At the Creation a single word was sufficient. "He spake, and it was done;" "By the breath of the Lord were the heavens made." So in the redemption of the world a word was enough. Heaven and earth may pass away, but his word—never! When the Son of God walked our earth, a word from him sufficed for every occasion. If he spake, the tempest slept, the fig tree withered, disease vanished, the grave gave up its dead, vice was conquered. He smiles, and men live. He frowns, and the earth quakes. If only God has spoken, we may wait with confidence and calmness for the performance.

VII. THE EVENT SHALL BRING UNIVERSAL HONOUR TO JEHOVAH. "All the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord" have done it. In other words, all kings and statesmen shall learn that I Jehovah am supreme—am King over all mankind. "By me kings rule;" "He putteth down one, and setteth up another." And has not this prophecy been fulfilled? Has not faith in idols ceased among most of the civilized nations? Has not our God obtained for himself great renown? There is a more intelligent belief in God to-day than ever there has been in the past; and this admiration of God grows and strengthens. The number of real atheists is small; they are the units. Men of intelligence and culture confess that there is, behind all the machinery of the visible world, an Unseen Power—the hand of the wonder-working God! Waves of scepticism may now and again pass over the surface of human thought; but these are soon spent; and when they are past, there is seen the solid rock of intelligent belief and reverent faith. His Name shall eventually shine resplendent as the noonday sun.—D.

Vers. 1—21.—*A parabolic setting forth of the relations of Judah to Babylon and Egypt.* "And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable," etc. Let us notice—

I. THE PARABLE AND ITS INTERPRETATION. It would be unwise to attempt to fix a definite meaning to every minute feature of the parable; and its chief features are interpreted for us by Ezekiel. The great eagle is intended to represent the King of Babylon, and, being a royal bird, it is fitly chosen for that purpose. Its "great wings and long pinions" indicate the wide extent of Nebuchadnezzar's dominions. And the fulness of its feathers and their divers colours denote the great number of his subjects and their various races and tongues. Lebanon sets forth Jerusalem, and is perhaps chosen for that purpose because it is the proper home of the cedar. The top, or lofty crown, of the cedar (ver. 4) represents the princes of the royal house (ver. 12); the topmost of the young twigs, Jehoiachin, the youthful and rightful King of Judah; and the "land of traffic" into which they were carried by Nebuchadnezzar was

Babylon. By "the seed of the land" (ver. 5) is meant Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiachin, whom the Chaldean monarch set upon the throne at Jerusalem, and who was to be, not as a great and stately cedar, but as a vine needing support, yet flourishing and fruitful. But another eagle, great, yet inferior to the former one, is introduced, and this represents Egypt. Babylon is *the* great eagle, Egypt is only *a* great eagle. Now, Zedekiah had taken an oath of fealty to Nebuchadnezzar, but notwithstanding that, he turned to Egypt, seeking an alliance in order that he might become independent of the Babylonian power. Such an alliance was actually formed; and by reason thereof Zedekiah was to be brought to ruin as a vine plucked up by the roots.

II. THE LESSONS WHICH IT ADDRESSED TO THE JEWS OF THE PROPHET'S DAY. 1. *The folly of entering into alliance with Egypt.* The great aim of this prophecy was to keep the Jews from forming such an alliance. It was communicated between the sixth month of the sixth year (ch. viii. 1) and the fifth month of the seventh year (ch. xx. 1) of Jehoiachin's captivity, or of Zedekiah's reign. The alliance with Egypt was not actually formed until the close of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth year of his reign (Josephus, 'Ant.,' x. 7. 3). To prevent the formation of that alliance, Ezekiel exhibits the folly thereof. Nebuchadnezzar had not treated the conquered Jews with rigour or severity. He had rather dealt with them with marked moderation. He did not attempt to destroy their nationality, but simply to keep them a subject kingdom (ver. 14). They might have grown and prospered in the conditions and circumstances in which they were placed (vers. 5, 6, 8). Prudence would have dictated the maintenance of their fealty to the Chaldean monarch. "Jerusalem might have remained the head of the Babylonian province of Judah, and the temple of Jehovah continued standing, had Zedekiah possessed wisdom and firmness enough to remain true to his allegiance to Babylon." And no insignificant measure of strength and prosperity might have been theirs. But what real benefit could they reasonably hope for by an alliance with Egypt, which would bring down upon them the hostility of the Chaldeans? 2. *The sin of entering into alliance with Egypt.* It involved base treachery towards Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet speaks of it as despising the oath and breaking the covenant which Zedekiah had made with that monarch. Speaking in the spirit of that alliance as an accomplished thing, he says, "He hath despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand, and yet hath done all these things." Covenant-breaking is classed by St. Paul amongst the very worst of sins (Rom. i. 31), while one of the features in the inspired portrait of a saint is that "he sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" (Ps. xv. 4). How base, then, would be the treachery of Zedekiah, who had sworn to his own advantage, if he should violate that covenant! Moreover, an alliance with Egypt would involve profane disregard of God, in whose Name the oath had been made. "Nebuchadnezzar had made him swear by God" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 13); and to break that oath would be to despise the Divine Being. "It is not only that every oath," as Schröder says, "and hence also this oath, is of a religious character, and that the despising of it necessarily compromised the God of Israel in the eyes of the heathen; but still further, considering the clemency of Nebuchadnezzar in making such a covenant, as Jehovah's instrument, Jehovah's goodness was turned into lasciviousness." 3. *The ruinousness of entering into alliance with Egypt.* As a consequence, the kingdom should be destroyed as a vine plucked up by the roots (vers. 9, 10). Zedekiah himself should die in the midst of Babylon (ver. 16). Egypt would prove powerless to help them in the time of their sore distress (ver. 17). And God himself would go forth against them to avenge his oath that Zedekiah had despised, and his covenant that he had broken (vers. 19—21). Yet, notwithstanding these earnest remonstrances and solemn warnings, and those of the Prophet Jeremiah also, Zedekiah entered into the forbidden alliance with Egypt, and despised the sacred oath which he had sworn unto Nebuchadnezzar. And yet "Zedekiah," to quote the words of Mr. Aldis Wright, "was a man not so much bad at heart as weak in will. He was one of those unfortunate characters, frequent in history, like our own Charles I. and Louis XVI. of France, who find themselves at the head of affairs during a great crisis, without having the strength of character to enable them to do what they know to be right, and whose infirmity becomes moral guilt. The princes of his court, as he himself pathetically admits in his interview with Jeremiah, described in ch. xxxviii., had him completely under their influence. 'Against them,' he complains, 'it is not the king that can do anything'" (Dr. Smith's 'Bible Dictionary,' art. "Zedekiah"). So he violated his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, and entered into league with Egypt. And the dread consequences of such conduct announced in our text were terribly accomplished (cf. 2 Kings xxv. 1—21; Jer. lii. 4—30).

III. THE UNIVERSAL AND PERMANENT TEACHING OF THE HISTORY. 1. *The instability of earthly pomp and power, greatness, and grandeur.* Mighty kings have often passed from the throne into exile or the dungeon. And kingdoms once strong and stately as a cedar of Lebanon have been completely rooted up or cut down. Such was the case with the kingdom of Judah. Abounding in vigour and prosperity in the days of David and of Solomon, it was much weakened by different causes and on various occasions, and at this time was fast hastening to its complete overthrow.

"Thus changing empires wane and wax,
Are founded, flourish, and decay."

2. *The chief cause of the decline and fall of kings and kingdoms is moral.* Sin had already made an end of the kingdom of Israel, and sent her people into exile. Sin had deprived the kingdom of Judah of most of its ancient prestige and power. And it and its king were ruined through the base treachery of that king towards Nebuchadnezzar, to which treachery he was incited by the princes of the court. "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness;" "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness;" "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." The luxurious self-indulgence of the rich, the cruel oppression of the poor, the greed of territory, the delight in war, the prevalence of vice,—these are the causes of the overthrow of nations. 3. *The heinousness of the sin of disregarding solemn oaths and covenants.* This is frequently done in international relations, as though it were quite justifiable. "Princes and politicians are apt to trifle with solemn oaths and treaties," says Scott, "and to devise specious pretences for violating them: but the Lord will not hold them guiltless who thus take his Name in vain; and few of them will be able to plead more plausibly for perfidy and prying than Zedekiah might have done, against whom these awful threatenings were denounced for breaking his covenant with the King of Babylon, and despising the oath sworn to him." "Think not to whom, but remember by whom, thou hast sworn an oath." 4. *The mutations in the kingdoms of this world are all subordinated in the providence of God for the promotion of the progress of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.* As soon as Jehovah by his prophet has announced the overthrow of Zedekiah and the destruction of the kingdom of Judah, he at once proceeds to announce the establishment of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (vers. 22—24). Before the setting up of that kingdom in our world all events were made to contribute to its inauguration. And since then all human history has been controlled by God for its growth and increase. And it is destined to advance and extend until it universally prevails. "The kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever."

"His Name shall endure for ever;
His Name shall be continued as long as the sun:
And men shall be blessed in him;
All nations shall call him blessed."

W. J.

Vers. 5—10.—*Discontent and its disastrous development.* "He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field," etc. Explain the parable as far as is necessary to make application of the text clear.

I. THE CONDITION ALLOTTED TO US IN THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS GOOD FOR US, AND USUALLY AFFORDS SCOPE FOR PROGRESS. "He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field," etc. (vers. 5, 8). Zedekiah King of Judah is meant by "the seed of the land." He was set upon the throne by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon, and took an oath of fealty to him. In so doing Nebuchadnezzar was the unconscious agent of Divine providence. And the condition in which Zedekiah was placed was a good one, and favourable to progress. But is there for every one a condition allotted by God? Has he appointed the station and place even of the obscure and feeble? We argue that such is the case, because: 1. The providence of God is universal, including in its vast operations the great and the small, the high and the low. Every person and every event is comprehended in the great plan of the Supreme Ruler. Without a plan such as this his providential government could not possibly succeed. And it is both unscriptural and unphilosophical to look upon that government as dealing only with great things. It is unscriptural, as we see from Matt. vi. 26—30; x. 29—31. And it is unphilosophical. "Must not the smallest links be as necessary for maintaining the continuity as the greatest? Great and little belong to our littleness; but there is no great and little to God." 2. The sacred Scriptures reveal the care of God for every person—not only for the great and noble, but for the obscure and lowly. He distributes to some men one talent, to others five; and he looks for the right employment of the one as well as of the five. In fact, the Most High manifests special interest in the weak and the poor and the unregarded (cf. 1 Cor. i. 26—29; Jas. ii. 5). 3. This truth is confirmed by the material creation of God. That creation is one grand whole, to the completeness of which every portion is essential. The system of the universe is, "in fact, so perfect," says Bushnell, "that the loss or displacement of any member would fatally derange the general order. If there were any smallest star in heaven that had no place to fill, that oversight would beget a disturbance which no Leverrier could compute; because it would be a real and eternal, and not merely casual or apparent disorder. One grain more or less of sand would disturb or even fatally disorder the whole scheme of the heavenly motions. So nicely balanced, and so carefully hung, are the worlds, that even the grains of their dust are counted, and their places adjusted to a corresponding nicety. There is nothing included in the gross, or total sum, that could be dispensed with. The same is true in regard to forces that are apparently irregular. Every particle of air is moved by laws of as great precision as the laws of the heavenly bodies, or, indeed, by the same laws; keeping its appointed place, and serving its appointed use. . . . What now shall we say of man? Noblest of all creatures, and closest to God, as he certainly is, are we to say that his Creator has no definite thoughts concerning him, no place prepared for him to fill, no use for him to serve, which is the reason of his existence?" For these reasons we conclude that God has allotted a place and duty for each of us; and that place is best for us. It is that which infinite wisdom and kindness have appointed; and is therefore best suited to the end which God designs in us and for us. And our condition usually, like that of Zedekiah, admits of progress. From the smallest hamlet there is a way to the great metropolis. And the obscurest and meanest lot affords scope for fidelity and diligence and advancement.

II. MAN IS PRONE NOT TO BE CONTENT WITH THE POSITION ALLOTTED TO HIM BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE. Zedekiah was not content. The kingdom had actually made some progress under him. "It grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature," etc. (ver. 6). Further progress was possible to him. At the very least, "he might have kept the fragments of the kingdom of Judah together, and maintained for some generations longer the worship of Jehovah." But he and the princes of his court were not content with this. Judah had formerly been an independent and prosperous and powerful kingdom: why should it now be subject to Babylon? Why should they not discover or devise means for recovering their national independence? Thus we are apt to fail as regards contentment. We look at the bright side of our neighbour's lot in life, and at the dark side of our own, and become dissatisfied and restless. We long for the gifts, the advantages, and the circumstances of others, and in so doing we depreciate the good which we actually possess. We crave freedom from some hindrance or infirmity; we are eager for larger prosperity or speedier progress; we chafe under our restraints, and are impatient for the realization of our wishes, and are heartily discontented with our present circumstances and condition. But, it may be asked, is man to sink into ignoble content, never wishing to increase his attainments, to advance in his character, or to improve his circumstances? Certainly not. Such a state of mind can hardly be called contentment. It is more akin to indolence and slothfulness; and it leads to stagnation and ruin. The true contentment of man is the contentment of a being created for progress. But such progress should not be based upon discontent with our present condition, and unfaithfulness in our present duties. That man only is fit for a greater position who makes the best use of his present position. "A man proves himself fit to go higher who shows that he is faithful where he is. A man that will not do well in his present place, because he longs to be higher, is fit neither to be where he is nor yet above it; he is already too high, and should be put lower." "Hence it was," as Bushnell says, "that an apostle required his converts to abide each one in that calling wherein he was called; to fill his place till he opens a way, by filling it, to some other; the bondman to fill his house of bondage with love and duty, the labourer to labour, the woman to be a woman, the men to show themselves men, all to acknowledge God's hand in their lot, and seek to co-operate with that good design which he most assuredly cherishes for them."

III. WHEN MAN IS NOT CONTENT WITH THE CONDITION ALLOTTED TO HIM BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE, HE IS PRONE TO USE UNLAWFUL MEASURES TO ALTER THAT CONDITION. Thus did Zedekiah in seeking an alliance with Egypt. "There was also another great eagle with great wings and many feathers," etc. (ver. 7). He had solemnly sworn fealty to Nebuchadnezzar for himself and the people under him. If there was anything in his circumstances or condition which he wished to be altered, he should have applied to Nebuchadnezzar, not to Pharaoh. Yet in his discontent, and incited by his princes, he sought an alliance with the King of Egypt, violated the sacred oath which he had sworn unto the King of Babylon, and rebelled against him. Supposing that rebellion had been successful, instead of the ruinous failure that it was, it would still have been a great wrong, because it would have been achieved by dishonourable and sinful means. Should discontent ever prompt us to use ways and instruments that are not upright and honourable for the altering of our condition, we may be quite sure that that discontent is wicked . When discontent becomes strong and active, we grow impatient of the evolution of the Divine purposes concerning us, and are tempted to break from our submission to the guidance and control of God's providence, and to take the ordering of our life into our own hands. And if we will take the helm of our life out of God's hands into our own, he will not compel us to yield to his guidance. Moreover, if we will employ questionable means to accomplish our desires when we cannot realize those desires otherwise, we may do so; but it will be to our own injury.

IV. THE USE OF UNLAWFUL MEASURES TO ALTER OUR CONDITION WILL ONLY RENDER THAT CONDITION WORSE. So it was with Zedekiah. "Thus saith the Lord God; Shall it prosper?" etc. (vers. 9, 10). Zedekiah entered into alliance with Egypt, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who came and besieged Jerusalem, and after the people had suffered unutterable miseries by famine and pestilence, the city was taken, the temple was destroyed; Zedekiah, who attempted escape by flight, was captured and brought before the King of Babylon at Riblah, where his sons were slain before his eyes; then his eyes were put out, he was carried captive into Babylon, and died in prison in that land (Jer. lii. 1—11). Such was the disastrous development of his discontent. And still, if unchecked, discontent leads to ruinous issues, robbing the life of peace and progress, and conducting it to darkness and failure. If we will take the management of our life out of God's hands into our own, we shall certainly come into difficulties and trials, and perhaps even into ruin. We have neither knowledge nor wisdom enough to order our lives aright. "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;" "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and not upon thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." "Be not ambitious to do the highest work, the grandest work, but the work God gives you to do—be it the meanest service, be it what others call drudgery. You may make it beautiful by the spirit in which you perform it. Strive not after the 'many things,' but after the 'one thing needful;' and remember, every part assigned you by God is a good part—be it the servant's part or the mistress's, the teacher's part or the scholar's, the wife's part or the maid's,—the part of action or of suffering, of toil or of tears, of speech or of silence." "And be content with such things as ye have: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee."—W. J.

Vers. 22—24.—*The planting and progress of the kingdom of Christ.* "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar," etc. *Introduction.* The delightful transition from stern threatenings to gracious promises; from the destruction of the enfeebled and subject kingdom of Zedekiah to the establishment of the mighty and majestic kingdom of the Messiah.

I. THE PLANTING OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST. "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it," etc. (ver. 22). Notice: 1. *The Person by whom this kingdom was planted.* The Lord Jehovah declares that he himself will plant the tender shoot out of which the new kingdom is to grow. He comes forward "as the rival of the King of Babylon," or in complete contrast to that monarch. (1) Nebuchadnezzar cut off the top shoot of the cedar when he dethroned Jehoiachin; Jehovah will plant the top shoot in the Person of Jesus Christ. (2) Nebuchadnezzar carried his top shoot into Babylon; Jehovah will plant his "in the mountain of the height of Israel." (3) When Nebuchadnezzar planted Zedekiah a king, it was only as a vine, and with the design of keeping it low; when Jehovah plants the Messiah a King it is as a cedar, that it may grow into might and majesty. "I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it," etc. "This *I* is of powerful import, as the Speaker is no other than the Lord Jehovah, the Almighty, the purely absolute Being, whom no created thing can resist." 2. *The Person in whom this kingdom was planted.* The tender twig from the top of the cedar denotes the Lord Jesus, and the cedar denotes (as in ver. 3) the house or family of David. The prophecy looks back to Isa. xi. 1, "There shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit." There is, perhaps, a reference also to Isa. liii. 2, "He grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground." "It is Messiah as an individual," says Fairbairn, "that is here indicated; first, as a tender scion of the house of David, in the direct and proper line, then grown into a stately tree; and, finally, risen to the highest place of honour and power and glory. But the Messiah, who was to appear on earth only for the sake of the Divine kingdom, could not be regarded as apart from the kingdom itself; its fortunes must stand inseparably bound up with his history, and partake along with it of evil or of good." This kingdom cannot exist apart from its glorious King. Christianity is inseparable from Christ. 3. *The place in which this kingdom was planted.* "I will plant it upon an high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it." The mountain thus described is Mount Zion, as will be seen by a comparison of this place with ch. xx. 40. Yet not because of its natural height is it thus spoken of, but because of its spiritual pre-eminence. So also in Ps. xlviii. 2, "Beautiful for elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion," etc. And in Isa. ii. 3, "Out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Mount Zion signifies the seat of the throne of the Divine King. "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. ii. 6). And from Jerusalem the extension of this kingdom began.

II. THE PROGRESS OF THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST. "And it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar," etc. 1. *Its progress will be productive of benefit to men.* It will bring forth boughs and leaves for the shelter of men. "In the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell." The idea of finding shelter and safety in the Lord is frequently and variously expressed in the Scriptures. "How precious is thy loving-kindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings;" "Thou hast been a Stronghold to the poor, a Stronghold to the needy in his distress, a Refuge from the storm," etc. (Isa. xxv. 4); "And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind," etc. (Isa. xxxii. 2). There is assured safety under the government of this gracious and almighty King. "My people shall abide in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places." But this tree "shall bear fruit" also. The fruit is the saving power and grace which proceed from Christ. The subjects of his kingdom find sustenance as well as shelter in their King. He is made unto them "Wisdom from God, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." He gives the living water, which springs up unto eternal life within those who receive him as their Saviour and King (John iv. 13, 14). And he is the Bread of life, whereof if any man eat he shall live for ever (John vi. 32—51). The provisions of Christianity are rich and abundant and free (cf. Isa. lv. 1, 2; Matt. xxii. 1—10; Luke xiv. 15—24). 2. *Its progress will be productive of benefit to all men.* "Under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing." Men shall flock from all lands into this kingdom. Inspired poet and prophet predicted this in exultant song and thrilling eloquence (cf. Ps. lxxii. 8—17; Isa. lx. 1—14). And the New Testament supplies most abundant and convincing evidence that the blessings of Christianity are for all peoples. They are *adequate* for all, *suited* to all, *offered* to all, and *free for all.* Jesus Christ is the Saviour and King of the entire human race. 3. *Its progress will produce the conviction of its Divine origin in all men.* "And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree," etc. "The trees of the field" are the princes and potentates of this world. Expositors have endeavoured to fix a definite and special meaning to "the high tree, . . . the low tree, . . . the green tree, and . . . the dry tree." But it seems to us that the truth here stated is a general one. In the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms God himself works for the establishment and progress and universal triumph of the kingdom of his Divine Son. "He bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity"

> "For neither from the east, nor from the west,
> Nor yet from the south, cometh lifting up.
> But God is the Judge;
> He putteth down one, and lifteth up another."

And through all changes he is advancing the interests, and promoting the glories and universal supremacy of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And men will come to see this; they shall know that the Lord Jehovah has been the great Worker in all the changes and revolutions by which the triumph of the kingdom of the Messiah has been brought about. And all this is guaranteed by God. "I the Lord have spoken and have done it." It is well said by Hengstenberg, in his 'Christology,' "These last words point out that what may seem to the outward senses a mere dream, yea, the wildest of dreams, becomes, by virtue of him who promises it, the greatest reality. It is God who gives the promise; it is God who fulfils it." And Matthew Henry: "With men saying and doing are two things, but they are not so with God. What he has spoken we may be sure that he will do, nor shall one iota or tittle of his Word fall to the ground, for he is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent either of his threatenings or of his promises." Thus gloriously certain is the universal prevalence of his kingdom. And it is perpetual also. "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end;" "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Vers. 1, 2.—What mean ye, that ye use this proverb, etc.? Another and entirely different section opens, and we see at once from what it started. Ezekiel had heard from the lips of his countrymen, and had seen its working in their hearts, the proverb (already familiar to him, it may be, through Jer. xxxi. 29) with which they blunted their sense of personal responsibility. They had to bear the punishment of sins which they had not committed. The sins of the fathers were visited, as in Exod. xx. 5; xxxiv. 7; Lev. xxvi. 39, 40; Numb. xiv. 18; Deut. v. 9, upon the third and fourth generations. Manasseh and his people had sinned, and Josiah and his descendants and their contemporaries had to suffer for it. The thought was familiar enough, and the general law of the passages above referred to was afterwards applied, as with authority, to what was then passing (2 Kings xxiii. 26; xxiv. 3). Even Jeremiah recognized it in Lam. v. 7 and Jer. xv. 4, and was content to look, for a reversal of the proverb, to the distant Messianic time of the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 29—31). The plea with which Ezekiel had to deal was therefore one which seemed to rest on the basis of a Divine authority. And that authority was confirmed by the induction of a wide experience. Every preacher of righteousness in every age has to warn the evil-doer that he is working evil for generations yet unborn, to whom he transmits his own tendencies, the evil of his own influence and example. It is well that he can balance that thought with the belief that good also may work in the future with a yet wider range and mightier power (Exod. xx. 5). Authority and experience alike might seem to favour the plea that the fathers had eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth were set on edge. Ezekiel was led, however, to feel that there was a latent falsehood in the plea. In the depth of his consciousness there was the witness that every man was personally responsible for the things that he did, that the eternal righteousness of

God would not ultimately punish the innocent for the guilty. He had to work out, according to the light given him, his vindication of the ways of God to man, to sketch at least the outlines of a theodicy. Did he, in doing this, come forward as a prophet, correcting and setting aside the teaching of the Law? At first, and on a surface view, he might seem to do so. But it was with him as it was afterwards with St. Paul. He "established the Law" in the very teaching which seemed to contradict it. He does not deny (it would have been idle to do so) that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, *i.e.* affect those children for evil. What he does is to define the limits of that law. And he may have found his starting-point in that very book which, for him and his generation, was the great embodiment of the Law as a whole. If men were forbidden, as in Deut. xxiv. 16, to put the children to death for the sins of the fathers; if that was to be the rule of human justice,—the justice of God could not be less equitable than the rule which he prescribed for his creatures. It is not without interest to note the parallelism between Ezekiel and the Greek poet who was likest to him, as in his genius, so also in the courage with which he faced the problems of the universe. Æschylus also recognizes ('Agam.,' 727—756) that there is a righteous order in the seeming anomalies of history. Men might say, in their proverbs, that prosperity as such provoked the wrath of the gods, and brought on the downfall of a "woe insatiable;" and then he adds—

> "But I, apart from all,
> Hold this my creed alone."

And that creed is that punishment comes only when the children reproduce the impious recklessness of their fathers. "Justice shines brightly in the dwellings of those who love the right, and rule their life by law." Into the deeper problem raised by the modern thought of inherited tendencies developed by the environment, which itself originates in the past, it was not given to Ezekiel or Æschylus to enter.

Ver. 3.—Stress is laid on the fact that the proverb which implied unrighteousness in God is no longer to be used in Israel. There, among the people in whom he was manifesting his righteousness for the education of mankind, it should be seen to have no force whatever. The thought was an essentially heathen thought—a half-truth distorted into a falsehood.

Ver. 4.—**Behold, all souls are mine, etc.** The words imply, not only creation, ownership, absolute authority, on the part of God, but, as even Calvin could recognize (*in loc.*), "a paternal affection towards the whole human race which he created and formed." Ezekiel anticipates here, and yet more fully in ver. 32, the teaching of St. Paul, that "God willeth that all men should be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 4). **The soul that sinneth, it shall die.** The sentence, though taken from the Law, which ordered capital punishment for the offences named, cannot be limited to that punishment. "Death" and "life" are both used in their highest and widest meaning—"life" as including all that makes it worth living, "death" for the loss of that only true life which is found in knowing God (John xvii. 3).

Vers. 5—9.—The verses that follow are noticeable as forming one of the most complete pictures of a righteous life presented in the Old Testament. It was characteristic of Ezekiel that he starts from the avoidance of sins against the first table of the commandments. **To eat upon the mountains** was to take part in the sacrificial feasts on the places, of which he had already spoken (ch. xvi. 16; comp. xxii. 9; Deut. xii. 2). The words, **lifted up his eyes**, as in Deut. iv. 19 and Ps. cxxi. 1, implied every form of idolatrous adoration. The two sins that follow seem to us, as compared with each other, to stand on a very different footing. To Ezekiel, however, they both appeared as *mala prohibita*, to each of which the Law assigned the punishment of death (Lev. xviii. 19; xx. 10, 18; Deut. xxii. 22), each involving the dominance of animal passions, in the one case, over the sacred rights of others; in the other, over a law of self-restraint which rested partly on physical grounds, the act condemned frustrating the final cause of the union of the sexes; partly, also, on its ethical significance. The prominence given to it implies that the sin was common, and that it brought with it an infinite degradation of the holiest ties.

Ver. 7.—**Hath restored to the debtor his pledge.** The law, found in Exod. xxii. 25 and Deut. xxiv. 6, 13, was a striking instance of the considerateness of the Mosaic Law. The garment which the debtor had pledged as a security was to be restored to him at night. Such a law implied, of course, the return of the pledge in the morning. It was probably often used by the debtor for his own fraudulent advantage, and it was a natural consequence that the creditor should be tempted to evade compliance with it. The excellence of the man whom Ezekiel describes was that he resisted the temptation. **Hath spoiled none by violence.** Comp. Lev. vi. 1—5, which Ezekiel probably had specially in view. The sin, common enough at all times (1 Sam. xii. 3), would seem to have been specially characteristic of the time in which Ezekiel lived, from the king downwards (Jer. xxii. 13). As contrasted with the sin, there was the virtue of generous almsgiving (Isa. lviii. 5—7).

Ver. 8.—He that hath not given forth his money upon usury. The word "usury," we must remember, is used, not, as with us, for exorbitant interest above the market rate, but for interest of any kind. This was allowed in commercial dealings with foreigners (Deut. xxiii. 20), but was altogether forbidden in the case of loans to Israelites (Exod. xxii. 25; Lev. xxv. 35, 37; Deut. xxiii. 19; Isa. xxiv. 2). The principle implied in this distinction was that, although it was, on strict principles of justice, allowable to charge for the use of money, as for the use of lands or the hire of cattle, Israel, as a people, was under the higher law of brotherhood. If money was to be lent at all, it was to be lent as to a brother in want (Matt. v. 42; Luke vi. 35), for the relief of his necessities, and not to make profit. A brother who would not help a brother by a loan without interest was thought unworthy of the name. The ideal of the social polity of Israel was that it was to consist of a population of small freeholders, bound together by ties of mutual help—a national friendly society, rather than of traders and manufacturers; and hence the whole drift of its legislation tended to repress the money-making spirit which afterwards became specially characteristic of its people, and ate like a canker into its life. The distinction between the two words seems to be that "usury" represents any interest on money; and "increase," any profit on the sale of goods beyond the cost of production, as measured by the maintenance of the worker and his family. To buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest was not to be the rule in a nation of brothers, and it was wiser to forbid it altogether rather than to sanction what we call a "reasonable rate" of interest or profit. Hath executed true judgment. The last special feature in the description of the righteous man is that he is free from the judicial corruption which has always been the ineradicable evil of Eastern social life (1 Sam. viii. 3; xii. 3; Amos v. 12; Isa. xxxiii. 15).

Ver. 10.—A robber. The Hebrew implies robbery with violence, perhaps, as in the Authorized Version margin, the offence of the housebreaker. That doeth the like to any of these things. The margin of the Revised Version, following the Chaldee paraphrase, gives, *who doeth to a brother any of these things*. Others (Keil and Fürst) render, "who doeth only one of these things," as if recognizing the principle of Jas. ii. 10. On the whole, there seems sufficient reason for keeping to the text.

Ver. 11.—The word "duties" is not in the Hebrew, but is legitimately introduced as expressing Ezekiel's meaning, where the mere pronoun by itself would have been ambiguous. In English we might say, "He does these things; he does not do those;" but this does not fall in with the Hebrew idiom.

Ver. 12.—The word abomination probably covers the specific sin named in ver. 6, but not here.

Ver. 13.—One notes the special emphasis, first of the question, and then of the direct negative, as though that, in the judgment alike of God and man, was the only answer that could be given to it in the very words of the Law (Lev. xx. 9, 11, 13).

Vers. 14—17.—Now, lo! etc. The law of personal responsibility had been pressed on its darker side. It is now asserted in its brighter, and that with the special emphasis indicated in its opening words. The proverb of the "sour grapes" receives a direct contradiction. The son of the evil-doer may take warning by his father's example, and repent, as Ezekiel exhorted those among whom he lived to do. In that case he need fear no inherited or transmitted curse. He shall surely live; Hebrew, *living he shall live*. That truth came to Ezekiel as with the force of a new apocalypse, and it is obviously "exceeding broad," with far-reaching consequences both in ethics and theology.

Ver. 18.—The reappearance of the father, with the same emphatic "lo!" seems to imply that Ezekiel thought of the two phenomena as possibly contemporaneous. Men might see before them, at the same time, the father dying in his sins, and the son turning from them and gaining the true life.

Ver. 19.—Why? doth not the son, etc.? The words are better taken, with the LXX., Vulgate, Revised Version, and most critics, as a single question, *Why doth not the son bear*, etc.? What is the explanation of a fact which seemingly contradicts the teaching of the Law? The answer to the question seems at first only an iteration of what had been stated before. The son repents, and therefore does not bear his father's iniquity. A man is responsible for his own sins, and for those only. To think otherwise is to think of God as less righteous than man.

Vers. 21, 22.—But if the wicked will turn, etc. Here, however, there is a distinct advance. The question is carried further into the relations between the past and the present of the same man, between his old and his new self. And in answering that question also Ezekiel becomes the preacher of a gospel. The judgment of God deals with each man according to his present state, not his past. Repentance and conversion and obedience shall cancel, as it were, the very memory of his former sins

(Ezekiel's language is necessarily that of a bold anthropopathy), and his transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him (comp. ch. xxxiii. 16; Isa. xliii. 25; lxiv. 9; Jer. xxxi. 34). Assuming the later date of Isa. xl.—lxvi., the last three utterances have the interest of being those of nearly contemporary prophets to whom the same truth had been revealed.

Ver. 23.—**Have I any pleasure, etc.?** Ezekiel's anticipations of the gospel of Christ take a yet wider range, and we come at last to what had been throughout the suppressed premise of the argument. To him, as afterwards to St. Paul (1 Tim. ii. 4) and St. Peter (2 Pet. iii. 9), the mind of God was presented as being at once absolutely righteous and absolutely loving. The death of the wicked, the loss, *i.e.*, of true life, for a time, or even for ever, might be the necessary consequence of laws that were righteous in themselves, and were working out the well-being of the universe; but that death was not to be thought of as the result of a Divine decree, or contemplated by the Divine mind with any satisfaction. If it were not given to Ezekiel to see, as clearly as Isaiah seems to have seen it, how the Divine philanthropy was to manifest itself, he at least gauged that philanthropy itself, and found it fathomless.

Ver. 24.—In the previous argument (ver. 21) the truth that the individual character may change had been stated as a ground of hope. Here it appears as a ground for fear and watchfulness. The "grey-haired saint may fail at last," the apostle may become a castaway (1 Cor. ix. 27), and the righteousness of a life may be cancelled by the sins of a year or of a day. Whether there was an opening for repentance, even after that fall, the prophet does not say, but the law that a man is in spiritual life or death according to what he is at any given moment of his course, seems to require the extension of the hope, unless we assume that the nature of the fall in the case supposed fetters the freedom of the will, and makes repentance impossible (Heb. vi. 4—7; 2 Pet. ii. 20).

Ver. 25.—**Are not my ways equal?** The primary meaning of the Hebrew adjective is that of something ordered, symmetrically arranged. Men would find in the ways of God precisely that in which their own ways were wanting, and which they denied to him—the workings of a considerate equity, adjusting all things according to their true weight and measure.

Vers. 26—29.—The equity of the Divine judgments is asserted, as before, by fresh iteration rather than by new arguments. In a discourse delivered, as this probably was, orally, it was necessary, so to speak, to hammer in the truth upon men's minds so that it might be driven home and do its work.

Vers. 30, 31.—That work was to produce repentance, hope, and fear. The goodness and severity of God alike led up to that. For a man to remain in his sin will be fatal, but it is not the will of God that he should so remain. What he needs is the new heart and the new spirit, which are primarily, as in ch. xi. 19, God's gift to men, but which men must make their own by seeking and receiving them. So iniquity shall not be your ruin; better, with the margin of the Revised Version, *so shall they not be a stumbling-block* (same word as in ch. iii. 20; vii. 19; xiv. 3) *of iniquity unto you*. Repented sins shall be no more an occasion of offence. Men may rise on them to "higher things," as on "stepping-stones of their dead selves."

Ver. 32.—**Turn yourselves, etc.** As in ch. xiv. 6, but there is no ground for the rendering of "turn others," suggested in the margin of the Authorised Version.

So we close what we may rightly speak of as among the noblest of Ezekiel's utterances, that which makes him take his place side by side with the greatest of the prophets as a preacher of repentance and forgiveness. In the next chapter he returns to his parables of history after the fashion of those of ch. xvii.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 2, 3.—*An old proverb discarded.* The proverb of the sour grapes was but an expression of a prevalent belief of the Jews, viz. that guilt is hereditary. Whatever element of truth there may have been in this proverb was overlaid and lost in a monstrous notion, which destroyed both the sense of personal responsibility and the conception of Divine justice, substituting doctrines of unavoidable fate and unreasonable vengeance on the innocent.

I. THE TRUTHS BEHIND THE PROVERB. This saying and the doctrine which it embodied were based upon dark, mysterious, but still true, facts of experience. 1. *Children share in the sufferings produced by the sins of their parents.* Sins of the fathers are visited on the children. This dread fact was recognized in the ten commandments (Exod. xx. 5). We see it confirmed by our daily observation of the world. The vices of the father and mother bring poverty, disgrace, and disease on the children. When the thief is sent to prison his children are left without bread. Fearful diseases appear in the constitution of innocent children following their parents' profligacy. 2. *Children inherit the appetites and habits of their parents.* The child of the drunkard is predisposed to inebriety. This physical inheritance in brain and nerve is confirmed by the ceaseless, powerful, unanswerable lessons of example. Where the head of the family leads a loose life the children are brought up under evil influences.

II. THE FALSITY OF THE PROVERB. 1. *God does not inflict real punishment on innocent children.* They suffer, but they are not punished; for there is no element of Divine anger towards them in what they endure. God permits the suffering, and he uses it, as he uses other troubles of his children, for discipline. But he cannot look upon the poor victims of the vices of others with any disfavour. It is a piece of hypocritical Pharisaism on the part of society to treat the children who come of sinful parentage as though they were disgraced by their birth. The effect of sour grapes is purely physical. When we transfer the physical fact to the moral world we fall into a mistake. 2. *Actual sin is not hereditary.* If it were, men would be doomed to sin apart from their own choice. But the essence of sin is a self-willed rebellion against God. When freedom of choice is taken out of it the evil thing ceases to be sin; it becomes a moral disease. So long as we have individuality and personal wills we can choose for ourselves. No one is utterly the slave of moral disease, or, if such a person exists, he is a moral lunatic, and not responsible for his action. Therefore he should be put under lock and key. Moreover, responsibility is measured by opportunity, and moral conduct is seen in the amount of resistance offered to the terrible slavery of an inherited tendency to evil habits. The proverb of the sour grapes was not only a discouragement to children; it was an excuse for impenitence among grown-up men.

III. THE EXPOSURE AND REJECTION OF THE PROVERB. 1. *A familiar saying may be false.* It may be a venerable lie, or, if true in its first utterance, it may have been exaggerated and so presented as to be false in its present application. 2. *It is the duty of the teacher of religion to correct popular notions.* This is the second occasion on which Ezekiel has exposed and repudiated a popular fallacy enshrined in the form of a proverb (ch. xii. 22). Christ fought prevalent delusions (*e.g.* Luke xiii. 1—5); so did St. Paul (Rom. ii. 25). 3. *There is an advance in revelation.* The proverb of the sour grapes was never given with the authority of a Divine truth. But in the earlier stages of revelation there was not enough light to liberate men from the illusion on which it was founded. As revelation advances it dissolves moral difficulties and clarifies our vision of Divine righteousness.

Ver. 4.—*The death-penalty.* I. THE PENALTY OF SIN IS DEATH. This is taken for granted in the present passage. The prophet is not now describing the kind of punishment that follows sin; he is indicating the persons on whom that punishment shall fall. When asked who is to die, he answers—The sinner; not his child, but the sinner himself. But the very fact that the nature of the death-penalty is taken for granted makes it the more apparent that the prophet had no doubt about it. Now, we cannot say that Ezekiel's language about the dying of the soul had any reference to a second death in Hades in which the conscious personality is annihilated. We should be missing the historical perspective if we supposed that any such idea would occur to a Hebrew prophet of the Old Testament. The Old Testament religion was concerned with this present life, and its sanctions were secular. The penalty of transgressions of the Law was to be "cut off" from among the people, *i.e.* to be killed—stoned or stabbed. The soul is the life, and to the ancient Hebrew for the soul to die is just for the man to have his earthly death. Still, there is in this no hope of a glorious resurrection for the sinner. His doom is final as far as man can follow it. Moreover, dying, not merely suffering, is the penalty of the impenitent, while wholesome pain is the chastisement of the penitent (Heb. xii. 6). Sin destroys body, character, faculty, affection. It is a killing influence in all respects (Rom. vi. 23).

II. THE DEATH-PENALTY OF SIN FALLS ONLY ON THE SINNER. Other consequences of sin reach the innocent; but not this. Herein lies the solution of the terrible enigma presented by the spectacle of children suffering for the sins of their fathers—or rather, a partial solution of it. The real punishment of the sin does not fall upon them

When the guilty father is drowned in his own wickedness, he sprinkles some of the foul spray on his children, and it burns them like spots of fire; but he does not drag them down with him to his dismal doom unless they freely choose to follow his bad example. Now, for the guilty man there is this dark prospect—he cannot shirk his responsibility and cast his punishment upon another. There is an awful loneliness in guilt. Every one must bear the load of his own sin.

III. THIS JUST ARRANGEMENT IS SECURED BY GOD'S OWNERSHIP OF SOULS. All belong to God; therefore he will not permit final injustice. The discarded proverb (ver. 2) rested on a sense of fatalism. The idea it contained was not just, but it seemed to be inevitable. The tragedies of Æschylus and Sophocles exhibit the operation of a Nemesis pursuing the descendants of a guilty man until the original crime of their ancestor is expiated. Physically, something of the kind does often occur; but in the higher moral and spiritual realm it is impossible, so long as a personal God takes personal interest in individual souls. The modern Nemesis is physical law. We can only escape from some form of unjust fatalism by a belief in a personal God and his direct dealings with souls.

IV. CHRIST DIES FOR THE SINS OF OTHERS. 1. *Here is a grand exception to the order of punishment.* The soul that does not sin dies for the souls that do sin. But with this fact we are in a new order. Christ's death is not a consequence of moral law. (1) He comes in grace. (2) His act is voluntary. 2. *Here is the hope of our deliverance from death.* We have all sinned. Therefore we all deserve death, for there is no exception to the law, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But not only has Christ died for us; he dies in us, we are crucified in him, and dying *to* sin through his grace we are spared the fearful dying *for* sin.

Ver. 14.—*The breach of heredity.* It is possible for the son of the sinner not to tread in his father's evil footsteps. Here we have the door of escape from the odious proverb of the sour grapes (ver. 2).

I. A FATHER'S SIN IS A SHAMEFUL SIGHT FOR HIS SON. The verse before us presents a distressing picture, though one with bright features in it. The father should be an example to his children, and they should be able to look up to him with reverence. Indeed, very little children naturally regard those who have charge of them as good. When first a child discovers that one who has directed his conduct is doing wrong, the revelation comes upon him with a painful shock of surprise. How sad that this should become a familiar sight! The very centre of authority in the home is then degraded. The child may still obey from a sense of fear, from a feeling of duty, or from mere force of habit. But all reverence is gone, and contempt is beginning to take its place. There must be something sadly wrong when a right-minded child is forced to despise his father or his mother. Surely such a prospect should be a warning to parents when personal considerations fail to influence them.

II. A SON MAY BE SAVED FROM SHARING HIS FATHER'S SIN BY ITS VERY SHAMEFULNESS. There is an influence which is just the contrary of heredity in sin. Unconsciously, by force of physical constitution, and by the influence of example no doubt, a child is drawn towards his father's sin. But when he reflects upon it and exercises his own judgment, he has miserable opportunities for witnessing its shamefulness which are not accorded to the happily guarded children of purer homes. The child of the drunkard knows the evil of strong drink only too well. Thus if he "considereth" he has an ever-present warning. Do we not see children who have turned with loathing from the habits of disgraceful parents, shunning the first approaches to the evil which has wrought such havoc in their homes, when other children who have not been to so painful a school toy with it in the confidence of ignorance?

III. IT IS THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS TO RESCUE THE CHILDREN OF WICKED PARENTS. The problem furnished by the wreck of broken-down character among the degraded creatures who haunt the slums of great cities is well-nigh insoluble, because so many of those hopeless beings refuse to be reclaimed. If they are removed to decent dwellings and supplied with the means of conducting respectable lives, they sink back to their old state of degradation. Emigration alone will not cure this disease of dissoluteness. We could only burden America and our colonies with useless paupers by sending its victims across the sea. They have neither the moral nor the physical strength to begin a new li

It would seem that the best thing we could do for them would be to shut them up in a hospital for incurables, where at least they might be prevented from spreading moral contagion. They have reached moral imbecility. But we can save their children. It is with the children that the hope of recovery is most encouraging. Good work already done in rescuing the little waifs of the streets points to a much more extensive effort in that direction. For the price of an iron-clad we might save the children of the slums of a whole city! It is here that the solution of our great social problem will begin.

Ver. 23.—*How God views the death of the wicked.* I. HE HAS NO PLEASURE IN IT. 1. *It might appear that he had.* (1) *Men transferred to God their own low notions of vengeance.* "Revenge is sweet" among men; therefore it was supposed that God must take some pleasure in avenging himself on those who have offended him. (2) *The rigour of the Law of God appeared to favour this notion.* If God had no pleasure in the death of the wicked, why did God let him die? Such a question goes on the assumption that the only motive of action is the personal pleasure of the agent. 2. But on the other hand, *it is certain that the fate of the sinner is no pleasure to God.* (1) *God is righteous.* The pleasures of vengeance are sinful. It cannot be good to feel anything but distress at the ruin of a soul. There might be a certain pleasure in the infliction of useful chastisement, because of its happy end; but the death of a soul is wholly dark. (2) *God is merciful.* God does not hate his enemies. "He hateth nothing that he hath made." God loves the souls that perish. His long-suffering and delay of punishment, his readiness to forgive the penitent, and, above all, the gift of his Son to redeem the world from death, are proofs that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

II. STILL GOD PERMITS IT. 1. *God has given freedom to his children.* It can scarcely be said that God kills a wicked man. The sinner is his own executioner; his sin is its own sword of vengeance. Sin itself slays. The sinner is practically a suicide. God has no pleasure in the ruin which the foolish man brings on his own head. But there would be no moral nature left for him, and therefore no possibility of goodness, if God did not leave him the use of that freedom which he abuses in slaying his own soul. 2. *God is just, though justice may be painful.* It may be said that we cannot throw the whole burden of his death on the sinner, because God has made him and has made the laws which connect death with sin. No doubt, therefore, there is a certain Divine retribution in the punishment of sin. But then God is just, and does not regard his own pleasure. It is only an epicurean deity who would refuse to punish sin because he took no pleasure in the death of the sinner. 3. *There can be no escape for the impenitent.* If it were merely a question of God's pleasure, we might appeal from that to his mercy. But he already denies himself to permit the punishment. It is therefore the more sure.

III. GOD PREFERS THE LIFE OF HIS CHILDREN. If he has no pleasure in their death, he will welcome any avenue of escape. Nay, he will provide all possible means of deliverance. Hence the gospel of Christ. 1. *There is a possibility of escape through amendment.* It can come no other way, or justice would be outraged; for it is better that the soul should die than that it should continue for ever in sin. The life of sin is a curse to the sinner and a blight on God's world. But a return to the better way is open to all of us through Christ (2 Cor. v. 20). 2. *This escape gives life.* God loves life, or he would not have created a world teeming with living beings. He loves to gives us a new life in Christ (1 John v. 12). Let no one despair. God does not desire our death; God wills our life.

Ver. 25.—*God accused of man's injustice.* The Jews were asserting that the ways of God were not equal, when the fact was that their ways, not his, were unequal.

I. GOD IS ACCUSED OF INJUSTICE. "Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal." It is felt that the rule of the supreme God should be very different from that of earthly judges, some of whom take bribes, and all of whom are fallible. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" exclaims Abraham, when venturing to expostulate with God on what appears to him a threatened injustice (Gen. xviii. 25). Yet the facts of life are often discouraging, and suggest to doubting, impatient souls a notion that God is not acting justly. The wicked prosper, and the good meet with misfortune. Children suffer from the misdeeds of their parents. Persons equal in character are unequal in fortune. To one the way of life is far more smooth than to another, although we can detect no good reason for the distinction. At one time a wild and mindless Chance seems to play with the world, at another a blind, stern Fate appears to hold it in an iron grip. We cannot discover the hand of justice behind the drifting cloud of circumstances. But: 1. *Justice does not involve equality*, but treatment according to desert. 2. *We only see a small part of God's ways*, and therefore cannot judge of the whole. The fly on the wheel cannot understand the machine. He might think the action of the "eccentric" deranged because it was unequal, and yet it is essential to the right working of the whole engine. 3. *We are too limited in nature* to judge, even if we saw all the facts.

II. THIS ACCUSATION RESULTS FROM MAN'S INJUSTICE. We impute to God what is in ourselves. We judge him by our own hearts and conduct. We know what would be our motives if we did certain things which we discover in the Divine action, and therefore we ascribe those same motives to God. We colour what we see with the hues that are in our own eyes. To the railway traveller the hedgerows and trees appear to be turning about invisible pivots, now flying to him and then swiftly whirling away; yet the motion is with the observer. 1. *We are unjust in attempting to judge God.* Here on the threshold the fault is seen to be ours. Even if God were unjust, since we are not capable of understanding his actions, we should be unjust also in venturing to give a verdict on his deeds. 2. *We are unjust in our general conduct.* There is a lack of integrity of heart in us even when our external behaviour is straight. We walk in crooked paths, and our conscience itself is perverted, so that the very rule by which we measure is warped. It is not surprising that God seems to be unjust when our standard of measurement does not agree with his action; but then the fault is with the standard. Until our own hearts and lives are right, it is not possible for us to form right views of God. 3. *We are unjust in ascribing our own injustice to God.* The inequalities of society are charged against God. They come from "man's inhumanity to man."

Vers. 26—28.—*Reversals of character.* We have here an instance of man's misjudgment of God, and wrongful accusation of injustice against him. People who have borne good characters are punished by God, and others who have earned themselves odious reputations are spared. This is the stumbling-block. But our text supplies the explanation of the apparent inconsistency. The good men have fallen into sin, and the bad men have repented and mended their lives. Therefore it is not unjust in God to treat them no longer according to their old characters.

I. GOD JUDGES ACCORDING TO PRESENT CHARACTER. Human judgment is stiff and blunt. Having formed our estimate of a man, we hold it after all justification for it has vanished. We are blind to those traits in his character which do not agree with our theory; or, if we are forced to recognize them, our first impulse is to twist them into harmony with the theory. Thus men's characters in the world outlive the facts on which they are founded. They are not all equal in this respect. A good character is more easily lost than a bad character. If a man has once earned an evil name, it is almost impossible for him to divest himself of it. People will not believe in his thorough conversion. This suspicion is partly due to ignorance of the hearts of men, and to a consequent danger of being imposed upon by hypocrisy. But God knows hearts. He is not bound by names and reputations. He sees present facts, and he judges men as they are. Then he judges according to present condition. He does not spare the fallen man on account of past goodness, and he does not rake up old charges against the penitent. We must not suppose, however, that God judges by a man's latest *act*. This would throw in an element of chance. A man is not condemned because he happens to be doing wrong at the moment of death, or saved because death finds him on his knees in prayer. But when the whole *life* is turned round, God judges by its present character, and not by its former state.

II. REVERSALS OF CHARACTER ARE POSSIBLE. We are not arguing on hypothetical cases. The ways of God to men are to be justified in part by the knowledge that such cases exist. 1. *The good man may fall away into sin.* When this happens, the world lifts up its hands in horror at what it supposes to be a revelation of monstrous and long-continued hypocrisy; but there may be no hypocrisy in the case. The fallen man may have been sincere in his earlier life of goodness. But he has turned aside from it. Here is a terrible warning. No character is crystalline; all characters are more or less mobile. The best man may fall. Then all his former goodness will not save him. We have reason for watchfulness, diffidence, and prayer for God's protection. 2. *The bad man may be recovered.* The stern and changeless judgment of the world dooms one who has fallen to lifelong ignominy. This is cruel and murderous. If we lend a helping hand, the fallen may be lifted up. By the grace of Christ the most hardened sinner may be softened to penitence and turned into the ways of goodness. Then his former sin will not hang like a millstone about his neck to keep him for ever down. God forgives it, and never mentions it again. It is the elder son, not the father, who refers to the former sins of the returned prodigal (Luke xv. 30).

Ver. 30.—*The alternatives of judgment.* I. THE JUDGMENT. 1. *It is to be by God.* "I will judge you." The all-searching and almighty Lord will be the Judge. None can elude his inquiry; none can resist his sentence. 2. *It is a matter of the future.* Therefore we cannot wisely make light of it by comparison with present experience. The future will be different from the present in this respect. Now is the time of probation; evil has therefore a liberty which will not continue. There will be a change of dispensations, that of judgment superseding the dispensation of grace. 3. *It will certainly come.* It is not conditional on possible circumstances. There is nothing hypothetical in the prophet's words. God does not say, "*If* I judge," but "I *will* judge you." 4. *It will come home to God's own people.* God will judge the "house of Israel." Israel delighted in the prospect of the day of the Lord, when her oppressors, the neighbouring heathen nations, should be judged. But she herself will also be judged. God will judge Christendom; he will judge his Church. The Master calls his own servants to account (Matt. xxv. 14). 5. *It will be individual.* God will not judge the house of Israel as a whole, but "every one of you." Each will be judged separately. None will be overlooked. 6. *It will be according to the conduct of life.* "According to his ways." (1) According to *conduct*—not according to creed, feelings, aspirations, but deeds. (2) According to *normal conduct.* His ways, *i.e.* his habits, his general course of conduct, not exceptional acts of virtue, nor occasional lapses below the usual manner of living. God judges on the conduct of the whole life.

II. THE ALTERNATIVES. 1. *Amendment.* This involves two changes, an internal and an external. (1) *The internal change.* Repentance. The first step towards amendment is that turn of mind which consists in grief and loathing for the past, together with a hearty desire for a better future. (2) *The external change.* "Turn yourselves from all your trangressions." It is useless to weep over the deeds which we do not forsake. Repentance of heart must be proved and confirmed by change of conduct. The drunkard must not only weep over his last night's debauch; he must give up the drink. The thief must cease to steal, the liar to lie, the blasphemer to swear. This is not to be fully accomplished without a change of heart (ver. 31). But while God only can truly regenerate us, we must voluntarily turn from the evil way and seek the new life. 2. *Ruin.* Ezekiel urges his readers to repent with the mingled warning and encouragement. "So iniquity shall not be your ruin." (1) The consequences of condemnation are *ruin.* When God sits in judgment over an evil life, terrible issues are at stake. No mere temporary suffering will satisfy the just demands of law. The broad road leads to "destruction" (Matt. vii. 13). The end of sin is an utter undoing, a shipwreck of life, a confounding of the soul, death! (2) This ruin flows directly from *sin.* God does not send an angel of judgment to punish the sinner. His own iniquity will be his ruin. Sin works directly on the soul as a deadly poison. Therefore all that the judgment of God can be required to do is to make it apparent that the ruin is justly earned, and to show that nothing can be justly done to avert it.

Ver. 31.—"*Why will ye die?*" I. GOD EARNESTLY DESIRES TO SAVE HIS CHILDREN. He repeatedly repudiates the notion that he has any pleasure in their death (*e.g.* vers. 23 and 32). He does not regard that terrible fate with indifference, as though it were no concern of his, after the manner of an epicurean divinity. He might say that, as men have foolishly and sinfully earned their own ruin, he would regard their doom with complacency. But instead of doing so, he manifests the utmost concern, urgently expostulating with the self-willed sinners, and entreating them to save themselves. Nay, has he not gone further, in sending his Son to save the world before his guilty children began to repent and to call for deliverance? In like manner, Christ, lamenting the coming ruin of Jerusalem, exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37).

II. THE DEATH OF SINNERS IS IN THEIR OWN HANDS. "Why *will* ye die?" It is not written by God. It is not fated by destiny. It does not fall out by chance. It is not a consequence of circumstances. Secondary and external events may appear to be traceable to one or other of these causes. But utter soul-ruin depends on the soul itself. If the soul dies it is because it will die. The reasons for this position are two. 1. *We have free-will.* If we sin, therefore, we do it of our own accord. We cannot lay the blame on our tempters. There is always a way of escape from temptation (1 Cor. x. 13). The deed that is done under compulsion is no longer a sin. Every sin is the soul's free act. 2. *The death of the soul comes directly from sin.* It is not an extraneous event; it is just the natural fruit of the soul's own evil-doing. Therefore we cannot accuse God, or Satan, or nature, or circumstances. The blame rests with ourselves.

III. THE REASONS WHICH LEAD SINNERS TO COURT DEATH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED. "*Why* will ye die?" 1. Because of *indifference.* Many are heedless. They do not will to die, but they will the way to death. But he who chooses the path chooses its end. 2. Because of *obstinacy.* The appeal of the text is made against a stubborn spirit of self-will. God brings up the battering-rams of grace against the thick walls of the town of Man-soul. Pride makes men hold to their own ways. But pride will be humbled in the day of ruin. There is no pride in death. 3. Because of *the love of sin.* This love blinds men. They see the attractive wickedness; they should learn to see also the snake that lurks among the flowers. 4. Because of *unbelief.* This is not merely a wrong intellectual conclusion. There is a dangerous unbelief that comes from closing the eyes to unpleasant facts. Yet they are not the less true. 5. Because of the *rejection of grace.* If we will not to have Christ, we do in fact will to die.

IV. THE WAY OF ESCAPE FROM DEATH IS OPEN TO ALL. 1. *By casting out sin.* Sin is the viper in the bosom, whose bite is mortal. Any cherished sin brings death. The first step must be not merely to grieve over sin, but to tear it away and fling it off. 2. *By receiving a new heart.* We need to have a better nature. Nothing less than a new heart will suffice. Only God can give that (Ps. li. 10). Only the Holy Spirit can regenerate (John iii. 5). But the change depends on our seeking and accepting it.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 2—4.—*Heredity and individuality.* The proverb here quoted embodied a popular sentiment. Those who suffered from the troubles and calamities of the time were not willing to admit that their sufferings were only their deserts; they endeavoured to thrust the blame upon others than themselves; and accordingly they complained that they had to endure the consequences of the evil deeds of their ancestors. One generation—so they put it—ate the sour grapes, and escaped the consequences; a succeeding generation endured these consequences, their teeth were set on edge. There was a half-truth in such representations; for society is linked together by bonds of succession and inheritance which constitute solidarity and unity; yet at the same time, so far as responsibility is concerned, God deals with men as individuals.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF HEREDITY UPON CHARACTER. Physically, the power of heredity is vast. Every individual, we are told by men of science, is the product of parents, with the addition of such peculiarity as they attribute to the other principle, viz. variation. A man's birth, breeding, and training count for very much; they determine the locality of his early days, the climate, the political and social circumstances, the religious education, the associations, of childhood and of youth. The bodily constitution, including the nervous organization, the temperament and the inclinations springing from it, are to a very large extent hereditary. The environment is largely the effect of birth, and the early influences involved in it. Those who adopt the "naturalistic" system of morals, to whom man appears the effect of definite causes—the "determinists," as they are called in philosophy—consider that circumstances, and such character as is itself the product of circumstances, determine what the man *will* be and *must* be. Whilst even those who advocate spiritual ethics, and who believe in human liberty, are quite willing to admit that all men owe to hereditary causes and influences very much which makes them what they are.

II. THE LIMITS TO THIS INFLUENCE. 1. Heredity does not interfere with man's moral nature. The will, the freedom, of man are as real as the motives upon which he acts, with which he identifies himself. There is a distinction absolute and ineffaceable between the material and animal on the one side, and the spiritual upon the other. 2. Nor with man's responsibility. If man were not free, he would not be responsible. We do not speak of the sun as responsible for shining, or a bird as responsible for flying. But we cannot avoid speaking and thinking of men as responsible for all their purposes, endeavours, and habits. The wicked are blamable because, when good and evil were before them, and they were free to choose the good, they chose the evil. 3. Nor with God's justice and grace. Ezekiel makes a great point of vindicating the ways of God with men, of showing that every individual will certainly be dealt with, not upon capricious or unjust principles, but with omniscient wisdom, inflexible righteousness, and considerate mercy. Thus, in the sight of God, all circumstances are apparent, and in the judgment of God all circumstances are taken into account, which justly affect an individual's guilt. Heredity may be among such circumstances, and allowance is doubtless made for tendencies inherited, for early neglect, for unfavourable influences of whatever kind. Where little is given, little is required. But all this does not affect the great fact that every individual is held responsible for his own moral position and conduct. None can escape judgment and censure by pleading the iniquities of his progenitors, as if those iniquities were an excuse for yielding to temptation. Every one shall bear his own burden. All souls are God's, to rule, to weigh, to recompense. From whomsoever sprung, the just shall live, and the soul that sinneth, it shall die.—T.

Vers. 5—18.—*The moral alternative.* With a legal minuteness, and with a directness and plainness becoming to the teacher of practical morality, the prophet presents the alternative and antithesis of human life. If not in every particular, still in almost every particular, the picture of the good and of the bad man painted in this passage would be admitted by moralists of every school to be faithful and fair.

I. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE GOOD AND OF THE BAD MAN. As the classes are exclusive, each negativing the other, it is sufficient to name the characteristics of the good man, with the understanding that the bad man is he in whom these characteristics are wanting. 1. The good man is characterized by justice in dealing with his fellow-men. 2. He refrains from idolatry of every kind. 3. He avoids adultery and every form of impurity. 4. He refrains from oppressing those who, for any reason, are within his power. 5. He abstains from violence in the treatment of others. 6. He is charitable to the poor and needy. 7. He forbears taking advantage of those who, by misfortune and poverty, are within his power. 8. He scrupulously and cheerfully obeys the Divine laws.

II. THE RECOMPENSE OF THE GOOD AND OF THE BAD MAN. 1. To the good is promised life, which is to be understood, not in the narrow and physical signification of the word, but in its large and scriptural sense. 2. Against the wicked is threatened death, which is to be interpreted as including the effects of God's righteous anger—a doom the most awful which can be pronounced and executed.

APPLICATION. The minister of religion may from this solemn passage learn the imperative duty of teaching morality. There must indeed be a foundation laid for such preaching in spiritual and evangelical doctrine; but the superstructure must not be neglected. The wise teacher, before entering into detail as to human character and conduct, will consider his audience, and the time and occasion; for all subjects are not to be treated before persons of every class, of every age, of both sexes. But he will find opportunities for stating and enforcing the precepts of the Law in the spirit and with the motives of the gospel. And the faithful minister will not shrink from depicting, though for the most part in careful and scriptural language, the penalties following upon disobedience to God's laws, as well as the rewards assured to the loyal and the good. It is true that those who are saved are saved by grace; but it is also true that all men, without exception, are judged by their works, and that God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or bad.—T.

Vers. 19—22.—*Personal responsibility.* We can only account for the Prophet Ezekiel laying such special stress upon the principle of individuality in religion by supposing that, in his time and among those with whom he associated, there was a prevalent disposition and habit leading to the denial of what seems to us an unquestionable truth. Indeed, in some form or other, men do incline to shift responsibility from themselves to their parents, their early teachers, their companions, the society in which their lot is cast.

I. THE VAIN AND DECEPTIVE CONTENTION THAT THE MORAL QUALITY OF ONE GENERATION IS IMPUTED TO ANOTHER. This contention may take either of two forms. 1. The son of a good father is apt to rely upon his father's goodness. There is no doubt that such a one may inherit much that is advantageous, *e.g.* a good constitution, a happy temperament, a good introduction to life, the favourable regard of many helpful friends. And it is sometimes forgotten that all this does not interfere with responsibility; in fact, he who is so highly favoured is thereby raised to a higher level of accountability. Much is given, and much will be required. 2. The son of a bad father is apt to excuse his faults by casting the blame for them upon the transmission of evil influences by heredity, or upon circumstances traceable to family relationships. It is the case that such a person starts heavily weighted upon the race of life; his temptations to error and sin are many and urgent, and restraining influences are weakened. Allowances are made by men, and no doubt by God also, for such disadvantages; but they do not destroy the moral responsibility of the free agent.

II. THE WITNESS OF THE CONSCIENCE TO INDIVIDUAL AND INALIENABLE RESPONSIBILITY. Reference has been made to the attempts too often made by sinners to cast their responsibility upon others. But it may unhesitatingly be asserted that those who put forward such excuses are never themselves convinced by them. In their hearts they are well aware that there is no sincerity in such excuses, that they are mere subterfuges. The conscience within, which accuses and excuses, gives no uncertain sound. The religious teacher, the Christian preacher, who seeks to convince men of sin has the assurance that the inner monitor of his hearers supports his endeavour, that he neither upbraids nor pleads alone. When the Lord God exclaims by the voice of his prophet, "Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?" every man, convicted by his conscience, is reduced to silence; for there is no reply to be made. When conscience is awakened, its witness is plain and unmistakable.

III. THE EXPRESS AND AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT OF GOD'S OWN WORD AS TO MAN'S INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY. The language of this chapter is peculiarly explicit upon this matter. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die; . . . the righteous shall surely live, he shall not die." And these statements are in harmony with the whole tenor of Scripture teaching. The Bible magnifies man's personality, and never represents man as a machine, an organism. Each living soul stands in its own relation to the Father of spirits, before whom every moral and free nature must appear to render an account for itself, and not for another. The teaching of our Lord and of his apostles is as definite and decided upon this point as the teaching of the Lawgiver and the prophets of the earlier dispensation. We are throughout Scripture consistently taught that there is no evading the great account.—T.

Ver. 23.—*Divine benevolence.* No such conception of Deity can be found elsewhere as in the Holy Scriptures. Where can the sentiment of this verse be matched in other sacred literatures? Thousands of years have elapsed since these words were penned; and the world has not produced or heard language in itself more morally elevating and beautiful, more honouring to the Supreme Ruler, more consolatory and inspiring to the sinful sons of men.

I. MEN HAVE CHERISHED SUSPICION OF THE DIVINE MALEVOLENCE. No one who is acquainted with the religions which have obtained among the nations of mankind will question this. The deities of the Gentiles have reflected the moral qualities of the human race, and accordingly attributes morally reprehensible as well as attributes morally commendable have been assigned to the deities whom men have worshipped. Indeed, worship has to no small extent consisted in methods supposed efficacious to appease the wrath of the cruel and malicious powers from whose ill will humanity, it has been thought, had much to dread. And it is not to be questioned that even Jewish and Christian worship have not been free from some measure of this same error. It has been customary to refer the governmental and judicial infliction of punishment to a disposition to take pleasure in human sufferings and torture. The student of Scripture is aware that there is no authority, no justification for such a view; but the student of human nature is not surprised that such a view should have been taken.

II. GOD'S REPUDIATION OF MALEVOLENCE IN PLAIN AUTHORITATIVE WORDS. "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord God." It is indeed condescension in the Supreme Ruler thus to remove the misunderstandings and difficulties which men create for themselves by their own ignorance and sin. Again and again he represents himself as merciful and delighting in mercy, but nowhere does he give the least ground for a suspicion that he delights in, or even is indifferent to, the sufferings of the children of men. Since all his words are faithful and true, we can but rest and rejoice in such an assurance as that of the text.

III. GOD'S PROOF IN HIS DEEDS OF THE BENEVOLENCE OF HIS NATURE. Israel, as a nation, had abundant evidence of the loving-kindness and long-suffering of him who chose the people as his own, trained them for his service, instructed them in his Law, bore with their frequent disobedience and rebellion, and ever addressed to them promises of compassion and of help. But all proofs of the Divine benevolence pale before that glorious exhibition of God's love and kindness which we Christians have received in him who is the unspeakable Gift of Heaven. Had the Almighty felt any pleasure in the death of the wicked, he would not have given his own Son, while we were yet sinners, to die for us. He took pleasure, not in the condemnation and death, but in the salvation of men. In Christ his love and kindness appeared; for Christ came, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

IV. THE ENCOURAGEMENT THUS AFFORDED TO PENITENT SINNERS TO HOPE FOR ACCEPTANCE AND LIFE. The pleasure of God is that the wicked "should return from his way, and should live." Thus there is coincidence between the good pleasure of the Omnipotent upon the one hand, and the best desires and truest interests of penitent sinners on the other. He who repents of his evil deed, who looks upwards for forgiveness, and who resolves upon a new and better life, has not to encounter Divine displeasure or ill will; on the contrary, he is assured of a gracious reception, of immediate pardon, of kindest consideration, and of help and guidance in the carrying out of holier purpose and endeavour. The demeanour and the language of God are those of the compassionate Father, who welcomes the returning prodigal, accords him a benign reception, and proffers him all those blessings, now and hereafter, which alone can answer to the glorious and comprehensive gift of Divine love—eternal life!—T.

Ver. 31.—*Divine remonstrance.* There is something very impressive in the form of this remonstrance. If the question were taken in its literal sense, and published among men upon Divine authority; if men were invited to accept immunity from bodily dissolution;—in how many cases would the appeal meet, not only with earnest attention, but with eager response! The death which is here referred to must be that which consists in Divine displeasure, or, at all events, that death in which such displeasure forms the most distressing ingredient. The appeal may be enforced by several obvious but weighty considerations.

I. WHY WILL YE DIE, WHEN DEATH IS THE WORST OF DOOMS? If the death of the body is in itself and in its circumstances and consequences of a repulsive nature, all the more fitly may it serve to set forth and to suggest the evils denoted in Scripture as spiritual death. Insensibility and dissolution may be taken as figures of that spiritual state in which interest in Divine truth and righteousness and love has departed, in which there is no occupation in the service of God. The soul that has any just sense of its own good must needs shrink from such a condition

II. WHY WILL YE DIE, WHEN LIFE IS THE GREATEST OF BLESSINGS? The life of the body, if accompanied by health and favourable circumstances, is desirable and delightful. No wonder that in Scripture the highest blessings of which the nature of man is capable are designated by the suggestive and comprehensive term "life." The spirit that truly lives is open to all heavenly appeals and influences, finds in the just exercise of its powers the fullest satisfaction, experiences the blessedness of fellowship with the ever-living God. Our Lord Christ himself came to this world, and wrought and suffered as he did, in order that "we might have life, and might have it more abundantly." The appeal of the text calls upon us to accept this priceless boon.

III. WHY WILL YE DIE, SEEING THAT THE MEANS OF LIFE ARE WITHIN YOUR REACH? There would be mockery in the appeal of the text were this not so. But he who alone can provide both the means and the end compassionately addresses those who have forfeited life and have deserved death, and urges upon them the remonstrance, "Why will ye die?" It is a remonstrance which comes home with tenfold force to those who listen to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, "the true God and the Eternal Life." Knowledge and faith, the Holy Spirit of God himself, and the truth which he reveals and applies to the nature of man;—here are the means, here is the living agency, by which men may rise "from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness." When such means and such agency are provided, the guilt and folly are manifest of those who choose death rather than life.

IV. WHY WILL YE DIE, WHEN GOD HIMSELF WISHES FOR YOUR LIFE RATHER THAN DEATH? The benevolence of the Divine nature finds expression in the virtual entreaty of the text. It is as though a kind of infatuated wilfulness were presumed to exist in the breasts of sinful men; as if, while their Maker and Judge wishes to be their Saviour, they were indisposed to accept the boon offered by his pity and loving-kindness. It is as though the eternal Lord himself, against whom sinners have offended, urged his own compassion upon those who have no pity upon themselves.

V. WHY WILL YE DIE, WHEN CHRIST HAS DIED FOR YOU? He gave his life a ransom for many. The Saviour's death is represented as the redemption, the purchase price, securing the exemption from death of those who accept the provision of Divine mercy and love. The appeal is powerful which is made to sinful men not to refuse the boon so graciously offered, and secured at a price so costly. Christ died that we might live.—T.

Vers. 1—4.—*The Divine equity.* The unbounded compassion of God is seen in his patience under human provocation, and in his repeated messages to rebellious men. There is "line upon line, precept upon precept." Every style of expostulation is adopted; every complaint silenced; for his "love is stronger than death," mightier than sin.

I. GOD HAS SUPREME PROPRIETORSHIP IN MEN. "All souls are mine." This statement is prefaced by a "Behold!" for this was a fact overlooked by querulous men. As undisputed and irresponsible Proprietor of souls, God need give no account of his doings. Every lip of complaint ought to be dumb. And this truth has also an encouraging aspect; for as God accounts a human soul his precious property, he will provide for its security. Nowhere can we be so safe as in the hands of this Proprietor.

II. GOD'S SOLEMN ATTESTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. God's glory is his righteousness, and he deigns to make that righteousness understood and acknowledged by men. He loves to dwell in the esteem and admiration of his creatures; therefore he condescends to speak after the manner of men. He comes down to our level; and as in judicial cases we accept the testimony of men, given under the sanction of an oath, God attempts to scatter our doubts by speaking in a similar manner. That he is immaculately righteous, all the unsinning hosts of heaven affirm; and *this* shall all mankind ultimately confess.

III. SINNING MEN ALWAYS ATTEMPT SELF-JUSTIFICATION. These murmurers in Chaldea felt the severity of their chastisement, but did not feel the gravity of their sin. They imagined that it must have been their fathers' sins which were being avenged in them. This state of mind has always been a characteristic of the sinner. "My punishment," he argues, "is in excess of my sin." Now, a part of the penalty of sin is the blinding of the mind, the perversion of the judging faculty. The man fastens his attention on his suffering—loses sight of his secret sin.

IV. Vice is entailed from father to son; guilt is not entailed. It has for ages been a knotty problem among thoughtful men, whether children suffered for the sins of their parents. Undoubtedly they suffer—they suffer in privation, in health, in reputation, in the tone of moral feeling, in the loss of high example and holy stimulus. But properly speaking, this is not guilt, this is not punishment. A man's vices are entailed to his posterity. A child follows in its father's steps at first, until it learns to reflect; then often it turns away in disgust. But *guilt* means sin in the light of law, and a man does not contract guilt until he understands the law and can distinguish between right and wrong. At this point, *sin*, if persisted in, becomes guilt, and suffering then becomes punishment.

V. The last penalty of law is always the effect of personal guilt. "The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die"—it, and not another in its stead. Other suffering—such as poverty, ill repute, a sickly body, an ill-furnished mind—all this is disciplinary; all this can be made the means of higher good. This is not penalty, though it is suffering. But the culminating stroke of punishment, viz. death, falls alone on him who is personally guilty. No guilty man shall escape. No innocent man shall suffer final destruction. This is God's equity.—D.

Vers. 5—24.—*God's remonstrance with man's reason.* It is an act of singular kindness that God should stoop to reason with the perverted mind of man. It had been a pleasure to instruct the uncorrupted mind; but now that the instrument is injured, it requires infinitely more patience and skill to deal with it. Yet God deigns to explain his principles of rule, and will eventually vindicate, as supremely just, every secret act. But sinful men are self-blinded.

I. We are reminded of man's responsibility. God deals with men as creatures capable of discerning between right and wrong. Man's morality is, in God's sight, everything. To be righteous is his glory. The final inquiry will be not—Is he rich or poor? learned or unlearned? but this only—Is he righteous or unrighteous? Every man is undergoing moral trial. He must give an account of himself before God.

II. Idolatry is a root of various immorality. It is not merely a creed, nor yet only a form of worship. It indicates a state of heart, a departure from the soul's anchorage. The living God is the Source of human purity, human greatness, and to wander from him is to drift into darkness and vice and ruin. Wherever idolatry has prevailed, *there* has prevailed also unchastity, licentiousness, violence, and cruelty.

III. Parental influence is potent, yet not fatal. A father's opinions and beliefs will, in the first instance, be conveyed to his child; yet soon the child will gather opinions and teaching from other sources, and often modifies or reverses the beliefs of its parent. The evil example of a parent moulds, more or less, the character of a child. As a parent is the channel of natural life to the child, so too he may become the channel of moral and spiritual life. As a fact, the results of parental influence are conspicuously seen. Yet a son is not doomed to copy the character of his parent, nor fated to imitate his vices. He has the power to consider, to ponder, to choose, to resist. Strong influence is not fate.

IV. Repentance, at any stage of human probation, is possible. It is recognized, throughout the Bible, that a man may turn from evil ways. If, at any point short of death, a man is disposed to turn from a vicious course, all the resources of God's skill and power are on his side. There is no hindrance to a man's reformation and restoration save his own unwillingness. Incessantly, God is inviting such repentance.

V. Repentance leads to complete and perfect righteousness. Repentance is not merely a negation; it is a positive good. It is the first link in a golden chain that shall bind the soul in sweet allegiance to God. It is the first drop in a precious shower of blessing. It is the foundation-stone of a new character. It is the seed of a magnificent harvest. From true repentance every virtue, every excellence, every noble quality, shall spring. Give it time, and it shall bear upon its branches all the flowers and fruits of goodness. It is the first ray of heaven struggling to find entrance into man's heart.

VI. Righteousness is incipient life. "In his righteousness that he hath done, he shall live." Only *that* man who is righteous truly lives. The life of a man must include the life of conscience—the life of the soul. To eat, drink, sleep, is the life of an animal, not the life of an immortal. The first activities of conscience are the movements and signs of life. Therefore penitence is nascent life. Reformation is life. Reconciliation with God is life—the budding of the heavenly life. The life of grace on earth is the dawn of an eternal day. Such righteousness brings peace, rest, joy, into the heart—heaven begun below. These are the first fruits of the coming harvest. "The just shall live by his faith."—D.

Vers. 25—32.—*The path to life.* Sin has a blinding effect upon man's intellect and reason. It leads to most erroneous conclusions. It produces deep-seated and suicidal prejudice. It puts "darkness for light, and light for darkness." The most perfect equality it brands "inequality." It would make heaven into hell.

I. THE FIRST STEP HEAVENWARD IS THOUGHTFUL CHOICE. The chief folly of men is their thoughtlessness. They sink into mental and moral indolence. They will not investigate truth, nor ponder the demands of duty, nor forecast the future. But when "he comes to himself," he begins to reflect. "Because he considereth" (ver. 28), he turns over a new leaf. The man allows intelligence and wisdom and reason to prevail. He resolves to seek his real good. He chooses the best course, and determines to pursue it.

II. WISE DECISION LEADS TO NEW ACTION. Having made an intelligent resolve, the man "turns away from his transgressions." He begins with known sins. He abandons these. That is only a sham decision which does not lead to action. The will may be a slave to feeling and appetite; in that case no real decision has been made. The soul is divided. There is strife and war within! But if the man has *decided* upon a line of conduct, new action will at once follow.

III. ACTIONS REACT UPON THE AFFECTIONS. It is a known fact that necesary work which was at first repulsive ceases to be repulsive. We grow to love actions which are oft repeated. Especially if such actions are right in themselves, if they have a moral loveliness, if others approve them, if they produce good effects, we learn to love them. Our actions develop and strengthen our affections. The heart is benefited. The tone and temper of our spirit are improved. True, it is God that renews and purifies the heart; but he works through our own activity. He gives Divine efficacy to the means employed.

IV. THE AFFECTIONS OF A MAN FASHION HIS CHARACTER. As a man's sentiments and affections are, so is he. "A new heart and a right spirit" go together. The character follows the affections. The man that loves purity will become pure. The man that loves God will become God-like. So long as man is on earth, he never *is*, he is always becoming, good or bad, great or mean. Character here is in a state of fusion.

V. MAN'S SUPREME GOOD IS IDENTICAL WITH GOD'S PLEASURE. God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner; he has pleasure from his ransomed life. If my heart and life are right, I afford pleasure to God, I add to his joy. On the other hand, my sin diminishes his joy. For his own sake, therefore, he will hear my prayer; he will help me in my struggles against sin. Why, then, should we die? It is unreasonable. Every argument, every motive, is against it. To continue in sin is folly, madness, suicide.—D.

Vers. 1—4.—*The misapplied proverb of sour grapes.* "The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel?" etc. In the 'Speaker's Commentary' a connection between this and the preceding chapter is pointed out. "The last verse of the preceding chapter declares that God is wont to abase the lofty and to exalt those of low estate. This gives occasion for a declaration of the principle upon which these providential dispensations proceed, viz. that every individual shall be equitably dealt with—a principle that precludes the children from either presuming on the fathers' merits or despairing on account of the fathers' guilt."

I. THE SOLEMN TRUTH EXPRESSED IN THIS PROVERB. Regarding this proverb apart from the spirit in which it was used by the Jews, it sets forth the truth that there is a transmission of certain qualities and tendencies, advantages and disadvantages, from parents to their children; that children inherit good or evil, or both, from their parents:

that some of the consequences of parental character and conduct extend to their children. 1. *This truth is stated in the sacred Scriptures.* We find it in Exod. xx. 5, 6; 2 Sam. xxi. 1; Jer. xv. 4; Lam. v. 7; Luke xi. 50, 51. 2. *This truth may be distinctly traced in human life.* It is apparent *physically.* It is exemplified in the sound constitutions of the children of healthy and virtuous parents; in the debilitated frame and depraved appetite of the children of drunkards; and in the transmission of certain diseases of the body from generation to generation. The operation of this principle is clearly seen in the *secular circumstances* of persons. Prudent and thrifty parents often bequeath to their children material comforts and riches, while the reckless and thriftless squander their possessions and leave to their children encumbered estates or no estate at all. This principle is exhibited *socially* in the respect which is accorded to the offspring of honourable parents, and in the infamy of vicious or criminal parents which damages the reputation of their unfortunate children. It is apparent *mentally.* The children of educated and thoughtful parents generally manifest inclination and aptitude for learning and intellectual pursuits. The reverse is usually the case with the children of unthinking and ignorant parents. It is traceable even in *moral character and tendency.* The prolivities to sin in the offspring of depraved and vicious parents are far more active and powerful than in the children of the godly. To live virtuous and Christian lives is much less difficult for the latter than for the former. Moral tendencies are transmissible. We may trace the presence and working of this principle in *communities.* Much of the good and also much of the evil which we have in our life and circumstances to-day we inherit from the generations which have preceded us—from the governments, the Churches, the authors, of earlier ages. The connection of the generations necessitates the fact upon which we are dwelling.

II. THE UNJUSTIFIABLE USE OF THIS PROVERB. It was in common and frequent use amongst the Jews in Babylon and also in Jerusalem (Jer. xxxi. 29). It was used wrongly by them. They used it: 1. *So as to ignore their own sins.* They were suffering because of the sins of their ancestors, especially of Manasseh (Jer. xv. 4); and they repeated this proverb as though they had done nothing to merit the afflictions under which they laboured, and were being unrighteously dealt with. Whereas we have seen already in these prophecies of Ezekiel how widely they had departed from God, and how deeply they were implicated in the worst of sins (cf. ch. v. 5—11; vi. 1—7; vii. 1—9; viii. 5—18; xvi. 15—34). They were suffering not one iota more than they deserved for their own sins. 2. *So as to ignore the beneficial action of the essential principle of this proverb.* (1) By the operation of this principle good is transmitted from parents to children as well as evil. They overlooked all the good which they had inherited from such ancestors as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, and others. We inherit many and precious blessings through the lives and labours, the sufferings and sacrifices, of those who have preceded us on this planet. (2) The operation of this principle is calculated to exert a powerful influence in restraining from sin and inciting to virtue. The love of parents for their children is one of the purest and strongest affections of the human heart. That love, combined with a recognition of this principle, would constrain parents to live wisely and purely, lest otherwise they should injure their beloved offspring. But in using this proverb the Jews took no account of the beneficial operation of this principle. They quoted it as though it were productive only of evil. 3. *So as by implication to challenge the justice of God in his providential dealings with them.* They repeated this proverb complainingly, as if they were suffering wrongfully, and were not receiving righteous treatment at the hand of the Lord. They had themselves eaten sour grapes, and their teeth were set on edge; but they spake only of their fathers having eaten the sour grapes, and the children suffering the consequences. Thus tacitly they aspersed the righteousness of the government of the Lord Jehovah in relation to them.

III. THE CESSATION OF THE USE OF THIS PROVERB. "As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not any more use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine," etc. Ezekiel does not explicitly say by what means the use of this proverb should be brought to an end. But we suggest: 1. *By the manifestation of the personal wickedness of those who used it.* God would so bring their sin to light that it should be evident that their punishment did not exceed their guilt. Calvin clearly expresses the idea: "It was just as if he had said, I will drive out of you this boasting, by laying bare your iniquity, in such a manner that the whole world shall perceive you to suffer the punishment you yourselves deserve, and you shall not be able, as you have been hitherto endeavouring, to cast the burden on your fathers." 2. *Because of the relationship which God bears to all souls in common.* "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine." He is "the God of the spirits of all flesh." He is "the Father of spirits." In this relationship we have a guarantee that he will not deal unjustly with any one. All souls are his; and therefore he will not manifest partiality in his dealings with any. "The soul of one man was as much regarded by him as that of another. He had the soul of the father as absolutely at his disposal as that of the son; and he could have no motive for letting the one escape with impunity in order to punish the other in his stead" (Scott). 3. *Because the real punishment of sin can only befall the actual sinner.* "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This death is "the end of a process, the separation of the soul from its life-source, the Spirit of God" (Deut. xxx. 15; Prov. xi. 19; Jer. xxi. 8). Only in union with God can the soul live. When through Christ the soul reposes its utmost confidence in God, sets its supreme affection upon him, and renders its loyal obedience to him, it lives. Sin is the very opposite of this; it is disobedience, disaffection, distrust. It sunders the soul from God, and that is death to the soul. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." That separation is death, and that is the real punishment of sin. And it can come only upon the actual sinner, because it grows out of the sin. Sin and punishment are related as seed and fruit. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" "Sin when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." Men may and do suffer by reason of the sins of others, but that suffering is not their punishment, but their misfortune. Spiritual death, which is the true penalty of sin, can only come upon the sinner himself. "The wages of sin is death;" "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

CONCLUSION. Our subject shows: 1. *The fallacy of the notion that sin is an injury only to the sinner himself.* The essential penalty falls upon him alone. But others are ill-affected by his pernicious example, and feel some of the sad consequences of his evil character and conduct. "For none of us liveth to himself." 2. *The solemn obligations of parents to live upright and worthy lives.* All men are under such obligations. But parents are specially so bound by reason of their relation to their children. They ought so to live that their lives shall entail nothing but good to their offspring, in every respect—physically, etc. 3. *The temerity and sin of challenging the justice of the Divine dealings with man.* "The Lord is righteous in all his works;" "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne." If we cannot always discern the righteousness of his ways and acts, it is not because that righteousness does not exist, but because of the imperfection of our perceptions. These are not wide or clear enough to survey the vast extent or penetrate the profound depth of his designs and doings. Or our perceptions may be dulled or perverted by our sins. But his ways and works are ever not only just, but infinitely holy. "Righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the nations."—W. J.

Vers. 5—9.—*The just man delineated.* "But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right," etc.

I. THE CHARACTER MENTIONED. "If a man be just," or righteous. This justness or righteousness is not merely a state of correct opinion; or of becoming feeling on moral questions; or of religious profession (Matt. vii. 21). It is a condition of character. The just man "is marked by this, that his settled principles, his customary desire, is to do, not what is pleasant, not what is advantageous to self, but what is right." "Little children, let no man lead you astray: he that doeth righteousness is righteous."

II. THE CONDUCT EXHIBITED. The just man "does that which is lawful and right." Certain features of his conduct are here plainly set forth. 1. *Complete abstinence from idolatrous practices.* "Hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel." The eating upon the mountains refers to the sacrificial feasts in connection with the worship of idols (cf. 1 Cor. viii. 4—10; x. 7). Idolatry had become so prevalent and popular that certain idols were regarded as belonging to the people of Israel, the chosen people of the Lord Jehovah. But to these the just man pays no deference: he neither seeks their favour nor dreads their displeasure; but he worships God alone. Our idols to-day are pursuits, possessions, persons, to whom we are inordinately attached. Anything which we allow as a rival to God for the affection of our heart or the devotion of our life is an idol to us. 2. *Scrupulous maintenance of chastity.* "Neither hath defiled his neighbour's wife, neither hath come near to a menstruous woman." The just man controls his carnal appetites by his reason and conscience. 3. *Careful avoidance of oppression of any kind or degree.* (1) Robbery by violence. "Hath spoiled none by violence." (2) Injustice by peaceful means. "And hath not oppressed any, but hath restored to the debtor his pledge." The pledge referred to is some of the necessaries of life, as in Exod. xxii. 26, "If thou at all take thy neighbour's garment to pledge, thou shalt restore it unto him by that the sun goeth down: for that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep?" (3) Injustice by making a man's poverty the occasion of personal profit. "He hath not given forth upon usury, neither hath taken any increase." "*Usury*," says the 'Speaker's Commentary, "is the profit exacted for the loan of money, *increase* that which is taken for goods; both are alike forbidden (Lev. xxv. 36; Deut. xxiii. 19). The placing out of capital at interest for commercial purposes is not taken into consideration at all. The case is that of money lent to a brother in distress, in which no advantage is to be taken, nor profit required." 4. *Exercise of practical philanthropy.* "Hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment." The just man as delineated by the prophet not only refrains from injuring any one, but also endeavours to help those who need his aid. In the Bible a high estimate is placed upon the exhibition of practical kindness to the poor and needy (cf. Job xxxi. 16—22; Isa. lviii. 7; Matt. xxv. 35, 36, 40). Our Lord reckons and will reward such actions as done unto him. 5. *Righteous dealings with men.* "That hath withdrawn his hand from iniquity, hath executed true judgment between man and man." The last clause, perhaps, refers to the duties of a judge. But in every capacity and in all his conduct the truly just man endeavours to do what is right and true, and to promote the doing of the same by others. And as Matthew Henry expounds, "If at any time he has been drawn in through inadvertency to that which afterwards has appeared to him to be a wrong thing, he does not persist in it because he has begun it, but withdraws his hand from that which he now perceives to be iniquity." 6. *Faithful obedience to God.* "Hath walked in my statutes, and hath kept my judgments, to deal truly." The just man renders positive and active compliance with the holy will of God. That will is his rule of action; and he endeavours to be true to it and true to the Author of it. The man whose conduct is thus sketched by the prophet is pronounced a just man, a righteous man. "He is just," not only in profession, but in fact; not only before man, but before God.

III. THE DESTINY ASSERTED. "He shall surely live, saith the Lord God"—"live in the fullest and deepest sense of the word." This life is the antithesis of the death predicated of the sinner: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The "just shall surely live;" "The just shall live by his faith." The life of truth and righteousness, of kindness towards man and reverence towards God, is already his. And its continuance is promised by God. "He shall surely live," spiritually, progressively, eternally.—W. J.

Vers. 10—20.—*Personal character and destiny.* "If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood," etc. Most of the features of character mentioned in these verses came under our notice in our preceding homily. And other parts of these verses (*e.g* "the soul that sinneth, it shall die") have already engaged our attention. But this paragraph suggests the following observations.

I. THAT PERSONAL CHARACTER IS NOT HEREDITARY. We have pointed out (on vers. 1—4) that moral tendencies are frequently hereditary; a child may inherit a strong bias towards good or towards evil from his parents. But a person's real character is not the product of the law of heredity. A just man may "beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, and that doeth any one of these things," etc. (vers. 10—14). The character thus portrayed is the very opposite of the just man (vers. 5—9), yet it is suggested that this character may belong to the son of the just man. Personal principles and piety cannot be transmitted from father to son as property is transmitted. The son of a good man may repudiate his father's God, and refuse to tread in his father's footsteps. Eli was a good man, but his sons were "sons of Belial." David was a great-souled and godly man, but he begat an Absalom. And Solomon begat a Rehoboam. "Grace does not run in the blood, nor always attend the means of grace." On the other hand, a wicked parent may beget a son who shall shun his father's sins, and live a righteous and religious life. The son does not inherit either the righteousness or the wickedness of his father as he inherits the paternal possessions.

II. THAT THE HOLY CHARACTER OF A PARENT WILL NOT AVAIL FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS CHILDREN. The just man by his holiness does not save his wicked son. That son "shall not live: he hath done all these abominations: he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him." The children of the godly have great religious advantages. In the instructions, examples, and prayers of their parents they have most valuable aids to personal piety. Moreover, they probably inherit from them tendencies and aptitudes to the true and the good. Still, the parental character will only avail for the salvation of the parents. The children of the godly can only realize the salvation by realizing a character like unto their parents. David's godliness, though joined with intense love for his son, did not save Absalom from ruin. Hezekiah was a good man, but his son Manasseh was terribly wicked. Josiah was eminently pious and patriotic, but his children were notoriously depraved. True religion is an intensely personal thing; it is an individual life and experience and practice. All its important experiences and acts are essentially personal and solitary. Only the sinner himself can repent of his sins. No one can believe on Jesus Christ for us. If faith is to benefit us it must be our own willing and cordial act and exercise. We cannot work out our salvation by proxy. Every man must "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling." The Jews prided themselves on their descent from Abraham, as though by that their salvation was secured; but John the Baptist declared to them the worthlessness of their hope (Matt. iii. 7—11), and our Lord exhibited its utter delusiveness (John viii. 33—44). True religion is not ours in virtue of any human connection or relationship. It is a thing not of flesh and blood, but of spirit and principle; not of human generation, but of Divine regeneration.

III. THAT THE WICKED CHARACTER OF A PARENT DOES NOT NECESSITATE THE WICKEDNESS AND DEATH OF HIS CHILDREN. "Now, lo, if he" (*i.e.* the wicked son of just father) "beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like," etc. (vers. 14—17). Great are the disadvantages of the children of wicked parents. Parental example and influence are decidedly inimical to their highest and best interests. If they become true and good it will be notwithstanding their parents, not because of them. Yet such children may grow up righteous and religious, useful and godly. The son may behold his father's sins, not as an example, but as a warning, and may form quite a different character and lead quite a different life. The prophet mentions certain steps in this process which we may glance at with advantage. 1. Parental sins *seen.* "A son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done." Sons are close observers of their fathers' acts and ways. This should lead fathers to act wisely and to follow the ways that are good. It is a sad thing for a son to see follies and sins in his own father. 2. Parental sins *considered.* "And considereth." Observation is of little benefit without reflection. By reflection we are enabled to realize the true significance and bearings of facts and circumstances. By reflection facts become forces unto us. Inconsideration often leads to sin. At a time when Israel was "laden with iniquity" one of the grave charges laid against them was, "My people doth not consider." 3. Parental sins *shunned.* "Considereth, and doeth not such like." A due consideration of the ways and works of the wicked, their real character and certain tendencies, would lead us to regard them as solemn lessons to be earnestly shunned. Thus, according to our text, the son of a sinful parent may avoid that parent's sins, and practise the opposite virtues. Examples of this are happily numerous. The excellent Hezekiah was the son of the wicked Ahaz. Good Josiah was the son of the notoriously depraved Amon, and the grandson of the still more notoriously wicked Manasseh.

IV. INDIVIDUAL DESTINY IS DETERMINED BY INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER. "Yet say ye, Wherefore doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." No statement could be more explicit and decisive than this. And it is corroborated by other declarations of Holy Writ. "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself; and if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it;" "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God;" "Each man shall bear his own burden." Individual destiny grows out of individual character. "As righteousness tendeth to life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death."—W. J.

Vers. 21—29.—*Moral transformations and their consequences.* "But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes," etc. In this paragraph the vindication of the moral government of God is advanced another stage. Already it has been shown that the son does not die for his father's sins, or live for his father's righteousness. Only the soul that sinneth shall die; only the soul that is righteous shall live. Now the prophet proceeds to show that "so far from the sins of his fathers excluding from salvation, not even his own do this, if they be penitently forsaken." Or, as Matthew Henry expresses it, "The former showed that God will reward or punish according to the change made in the family or succession, for the better or for the worse; here he shows that he will reward or punish according to the change made in the person himself, whether for the better or the worse."

I. A DESIRABLE MORAL TRANSFORMATION. 1. *Its nature.* Several stages of it which are here specified will make this clear. (1) Serious consideration. "He" (*i.e.* the wicked man) "considereth" (ver. 28). Reflection is an indispensable step towards repentance. Thinking must precede turning. Thus it was with the psalmist: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies," etc. (Isa. cxix. 59, 60). So also with the prodigal son: "when he came to himself," and thought upon his father's house, and his own wretched condition, it was not long before he arose and penitently went to his father (Luke xv. 17—20). Consideration leads to conversion. (2) Resolute forsaking of sin. "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed" (ver. 21); "Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed" (ver. 28). There is no true turning or repentance apart from the renunciation of sin; and where repentance is both true and thorough there is a renunciation of "all his sins;" the sinner "turneth away from all his transgressions." He makes no reservation; he does not long or plead for the retention of any because they are small or comparatively uninjurious. He loathes sin, and endeavours to eschew it altogether. (3) Hearty following after righteousness. "And keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right." Getting rid of the evil is not enough; we must needs get possession of the good. Ceasing to do evil must be followed by learning to do well. Not only are we not to be overcome of evil; we are to go on to overcome evil with good. "He that would love life . . . let him turn away from evil and do good." If the evil spirit be expelled from our heart, and the Holy Spirit be not welcomed therein, the evil spirit will return with other spirits worse than himself, and they will take possession of our heart and dwell there (Matt. xii. 43—45). The desirable moral transformation includes hearty abandonment of sin and hearty cultivation of goodness. 2. *Its consequences.* (1) Forgiveness of his sins. "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him;" Revised Version, "None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him." They shall be so completely pardoned that there shall be no reproach because of them, no recall of them, no recollection of them. How fully and absolutely God forgives! "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more;" "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins;" "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us;" "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back;" "He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (2) Bestowment of spiritual life. "He shall surely live, he shall not die. . . . In his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. . . . He shall save his soul alive." In the favour and fellowship of God is the soul's life. "In his favour is life." And that favour is granted to the soul that penitently turns from sin unto God. (For additional suggestions concerning this life, see our notes on ver. 9.) 3. *Its great encouragement.* "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord God: and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?" God delights in the conversion, not in the condemnation, of the sinner; in the inspiration of life, not in the infliction of death. "The God of the Old Testament," says Hävernich, "has a heart: himself the essence of all blessedness, and mirroring himself in the blessedness of the creature, he has a heart for every being who has fallen away from him, and who is exposed to death. The fundamental feature of his character is holy love: he delighteth in the return of the sinner from death to life." "He delighteth in mercy." This is the great encouragement for the sinner to turn in penitence unto him.

II. A DEPLORABLE MORAL TRANSFORMATION. 1. *Its nature.* "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth." Here is the transformation of a righteous man into a wicked man; of a doer of righteousness into a worker of iniquity. The prophet does not set forth an occasional or temporary aberration from the right and the true; but the habitual and persistent practice of wickedness. Moreover, in the case supposed, the sinner "doeth according to all the abominations" of the wicked, and continues therein to the end of his earthly existence: he "committeth iniquity, and dieth therein" (ver. 26). That such a turning from righteousness to wickedness is possible is evident from the moral constitution of man. He is free to obey or to disobey God; to do that which is right or to commit iniquity. 2. *Its consequences.* (1) He forfeits the benefit of his former righteousness. "All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned;" Revised Version, "None of his righteous deeds that he hath done shall be remembered." This is the antithesis to that which was declared of him who turns from sin unto righteousness: "None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him." "Unless we persevere we lose what we have gained." "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which we have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward." (2) He incurs the penalty of his persistent wickedness. "In his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die; . . . for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." (On this death, see our remarks on ver. 4, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" and on ver. 31.)

III. THE EQUITY OF THE DIVINE DEALINGS WITH MEN IN EACH OF THESE MORAL TRANSFORMATIONS. (Vers. 25, 29.) 1. *Men sometimes challenge the rectitude of God's dealings with them.* "Ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal . . . Saith the house of Israel, The way of the Lord is not equal." The righteousness of the Divine way is thus denied, or at least questioned, sometimes even by the godly. Thus did Job (x. 2, 3). Thus also did Asaph (Ps. lxxiii. 11—14). If sore affliction or protracted trial befall us, we are prone to doubt and challenge the kindness, perhaps even the justice, of God's treatment of us. Yet "wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" 2. *Those who thus challenge the rectitude of God's dealings are generally unrighteous themselves.* "Hear now, O house of Israel . . . Are not your ways unequal?" The wickedness of the house of Israel had long been exceedingly great, and was still so; yet they were forward to charge God with unfairness in his dealings with them. The greatest sinners are the readiest to daringly call in question the holiness of the character and the righteousness of the doings of God. The more excellent a man is the greater will be his confidence in the holiness of the Divine will and ways, the more hearty his acquiescence in that will, and the more devoted his love to its great Author. 3. *If God should deign to reply to such a challenge, he will most amply vindicate the character of his dealings with men.* He does so in this chapter. When the evolution of his purposes in relation to our race is more complete, it will be unmistakably clear that in the salvation of the penitent sinner and in the condemnation of the persistently wicked he has acted in complete harmony with the infinite perfections of his being. "His work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he;" "Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the foundation of his throne;" "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and gracious in all his works;" "Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages."—W. J.

Ver. 31.—*A solemn and startling inquiry.* "Why will ye die?" The prophet has just exhorted the house of Israel to repent, to turn away from all sin, to turn unto God, so that iniquity should not prove their ruin. And now he addresses to them the brief and awakening interrogation, "Why will ye die?" This inquiry, interpreted in harmony with its context, implies, what has been already stated more than once in this chapter, that persistence in sin leads to the death of the soul. The prophet has also repeatedly stated that turning from sin to righteousness leads to life. And now, having completed the vindication of the Divine government against the charge implied in the popular proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," he earnestly appeals to them to turn from their transgressions to God, and thus to turn from death to life. And in this appeal he utters the solemn and startling inquiry, "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" Wherefore will ye not repent, and live? Why will ye persist in sin, and die?

I. THE RUINOUSNESS OF PERSISTENCE IN SIN. It leads to death. "Why will ye *die?*" Man can live spiritually only in union with God. "In his favour is life." Cut our world adrift from the sun with his light and heat, and ere long it would be one region of invariable and total death. All life of every kind would perish from the earth. The soul cut off from God dies; for he is its Life and Light. Apart from the grace of God, and the influences of the Holy Spirit, all men are dead through their trespasses and sins. Every genuine Christian is said to have passed from death unto life. "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life;" "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren." Absence of sensibility is the great characteristic of death. In a dead body the eyes are there, but they see not; the ears are there, but they hear not; the nose, but it smells not; the organs of speech, but they speak not; the nerves, but they feel not. Sensibility has departed. And they who live in sin lack spiritual sensibility; they do not perceive the beauties of truth and holiness; they do not hear the voice of God speaking through their conscience or through his Word; they do not realize the joys of religion; they are spiritually dead. But from this state they may be quickened into life by the Word and the Spirit of God; they may be renewed in heart and in life. But persistence in sin, resistance of the influence of Divine grace and of the Holy Spirit, diminish the possibility of the soul's renewal, and tend to render its death permanent. Redemptive facts and forces, even when applied by the Holy Spirit, affect the soul less and less unless they be yielded to. And conscience, even when quickened by the Holy Spirit, speaks ever with decreasing authority unless its authority be practically recognized. And so the moral condition proceeds from bad to worse. Persistence in sin leads to a deeper, darker death; or, speaking more accurately, to a more fully developed death. "Sin, when it is full-grown, bringeth forth death." Who shall express the dread significance of this death? It has been spoken of thus: "The words of pardon, the language of love, will fall unheeded. The glorious redemption of man's soul by Christ, and Christ alone, will have no power. That power has departed. Every day it grew less. Sin has deadened all the senses; and no longer can he see the radiant form of the Son of heaven. . . . Every good shall die. Every ray of hope shall die. Every offer of mercy shall die. Every idea of future blessedness shall die. Every resolve of hallowed obedience, every repentant feeling, every sorrowful emotion, shall die. . . . The sinner left to himself; the sinner left alone; the sinner bereaved of good, bereaved of holiness, bereaved of God; the sinner left alone to die;—this were hell, at which the stoniest heart would quail, and the stoutest soul recoil!" (J. W. Lester). This death, which is the full development of sin, is, we think, unutterably and inconceivably dreadful. Persistence in sin is ruinous.

II. THE WILFULNESS OF PERSISTENCE IN SIN. "Why *will* ye die?" The inquiry implies that man's ruin is of himself. The whole drift of this chapter has been to the same conclusion. 1. *Man does not die because of any unwillingness on the part of God to save him.* "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God;" "He delighteth in mercy;" "The Lord thy God is in the midst of thee, a Mighty One who will save: he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." He finds infinite satisfaction and joy in delivering souls from death, and in granting to them life and light. He has proved his willingness to save men by the infinite cost at which he provided salvation for them. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." 2. *Man does not die because of any deficiency in the Divine provisions for his salvation.* The purposes and provisions of Divine grace for human salvation are inexhaustible and infinite. Spiritual forces are not limited and exhaustible as material forces are. The reconciling or atoning power which is adequate for one sinful soul is adequate for a million, or any number of millions, of such souls. "Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all;" "He died for all." 3. *Man does not perish because of his inability to appropriate the salvation provided for him by God.* It is offered gratuitously on condition of repentance for sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Repent ye, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions," etc. (ver. 30); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house;" "Whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Man is summoned by God to repent and believe the Saviour, and God never summons man to any duty, but man either has the power to obey the summons, or God waits to bestow that power upon him. In the latter case man has but to be willing to receive the power and it will be given unto him in ample sufficiency for his needs. Man is prone to believe. In many things he believes too readily. And in Jesus Christ there is everything to awaken and attract the heart's truest, tenderest, and most reverent trust. Salvation is offered on such terms that every man may avail himself of the offer if he will do so. It is in the human will that the mischief lies. "Because I have called, and ye refused," etc. (Prov. i. 24, 25); "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life;" "This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."

III. THE UNREASONABLENESS OF PERSISTENCE IN SIN. "*Why* will ye die?" Man is so constituted that he should act from reason. He has instincts and other impulses which lead to action; but these should be guided and governed by his reason. His instincts and passions should be ruled by his reason, which is the glory of his nature, and raises him above the inferior creatures in this world. When reason holds its proper place and exercises its proper power, then the lower impulses of our nature contribute to our true development and progress.

> "When Reason, like the skilful charioteer,
> Can break the fiery passions with the bit,
> And, spite of their licentious sallies, keep
> The radiant track of glory; passions then
> Are aids and ornaments. Triumphant Reason,
> Firm in her seat and swift in her career,
> Enjoys their violence, and, smiling, thanks
> Their formidable flame for high renown."
> (Young.)

The Most High appeals to man's reason. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord," etc. (Isa. i. 18); "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons," etc. (Isa. xli. 21); "Why will ye die?" This inquiry implies that man should have some reason for persistence in the way that leads to death. It also implies that he has not a satisfactory reason. It is, perhaps, designed to bring man to pause, and lead him to consider his ways, and to ask himself why he pursues the way of death. There is no satisfactory reason why men will die. Persistence in sin is utter and suicidal folly. "Why will ye die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XIX.

Ver. 1.—The two sections of this chapter—vers. 1—9, 10—14—are respectively two parables of the same type as that of ch. xvii., the former telling nearly the same story under a different imagery, the latter a reproduction of the same imagery, with a slightly different application. **Lamentation.** The same word as that used in ch. ii. 10. The whole chapter finds a parallel in Jeremiah's review of Josiah's successors (xxii

10—30). It is noticeable that the princes are described as being of Israel. The LXX. gives the singular, "the prince," and Hitzig and Ewald adopt this reading, applying it to Zedekiah.

Ver. 2.—What is thy mother? etc.; better, with the Vulgate, LXX., and Keil, *Why did thy mother, a lioness, lie down among lionesses?* The image may have been suggested by Gen. xlix. 9 and Numb. xxiii. 24, or perhaps also by Nah. ii. 11, 12. The lioness is Israel, the kingdom idealized and personified. The lionesses among whom she had lain down are the heathen kingdoms. The question asks why she had become as one of them and adopted their cruelty and ferocity.

Ver. 3.—The whelp, as ver. 4 shows, is Jehoahaz, also known as Shallum (Jer. xxii. 11), who "did evil" in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings xxiii. 32), the words that follow pointing to cruelty and oppression like that of Zedekiah. The passage finds a somewhat striking parallel in Æschylus, 'Agam.,' 695—715.

Ver. 4.—The nations also heard of him, etc. The fact that lies under the parable is that Egypt and its allies began to be alarmed as they watched the aggressive policy of Jehoahaz, as men are alarmed when they hear that a young lion is in the neighbourhood, and proceed to lay snares for him. In chains, etc.; literally, *nose-rings*, such as were put into the nostrils of brutes or men (ch. xxxviii. 4; 2 Kings xix. 28; Isa. xxxvii. 29). The mention of Egypt points to the deportation of Jehoahaz by Pharaoh-Neche (2 Kings xxiii. 34; Jer. xxii. 11).

Ver. 5.—The second lion-whelp is identified by ver. 9 with Jehoiachin. For some reason or other, probably because he, as having "slept with his fathers," was not so conspicuous an instance of retribution, Ezekiel passes over Jehoiakim (B.C. 607—599).

Ver. 7.—He knew their desolate palaces; literally, *widows;* but the word is used figuratively in Isa. xiii. 22, in the sense of "desolate houses" (comp. Isa. xlvii. 8). So the Vulgate gives *didicit viduas facere;* and Keil adopts that meaning here, "he knew, *i.e.* outraged, the widows of Israel." The Revised Version admits it in the margin. The two words for "widows" and "palaces" differ in a single letter only, and there may have been an error in transcription. On the whole, I adhere to the Authorized Version and Revised Version (text). Currey explains, "He knew (*i.e.* eyed with satisfaction) his palaces," from which he had ejected their former owners, as his father Jehoiakim had done (Jer. xxii. 15, 16). Ewald follows the Targum in a various reading of the verb, and gets the meaning, "he destroyed its palaces." Interpreting the parable, we have Jehoiachin described as alarming Nebuchadnezzar and the neighbouring nations by his activity, and therefore carried off to Babylon as Jehoahaz had been to Egypt. The young lion was to roar in chains, not on the "mountains of Israel."

Ver. 10.—Another parable comes close upon the heels of the first. Thy mother; *sc.* Judah or Jerusalem, as the mother of Jehoiachin, who is still in Ezekiel's thoughts, and is addressed by him. In thy blood (For the comparison of the vine, see ch. xvii. 6.) No satisfactory meaning can be got out of the words, the nearest being "in thy life, thy freshness," the sap of the vine being thought of as its blood; and critics have been driven to conjectural readings or renderings. The Jewish interpreters, Targum, Rashi, Kimchi, and margin of Revised Version, give, "in thy likeness," *sc.* "like thee;" Keil, "in thy repose," *sc.* in the period of quiet prosperity. Hitzig boldly adopts a reading which gives, "a vine climbing on the pomegranate;" but (?). The many waters reproduce the imagery of ch. xvii. 5.

Ver. 11.—The verse describes generally the apparent strength of the kingly line of David. The word for thick branches, which occurs again in ch. xxxi. 3, 10, 14, is taken by Keil and Fürst as meaning "thick clouds," as describing the height to which the tree grew. So the Revised Version (margin).

Ver. 12.—The parable, like that of ch. xvii. 10, describes the sudden downfall of Jerusalem and the kingly house. The "dry ground" is Babylon, and the new "planting" indicates the deportation of Jehoiachin and the chief men of Judah.

Ver. 14.—Fire is gone out. The words are an echo of Judg. ix. 15. Zedekiah's reign was to work destruction for his people, as that of Abimelech had done.

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 1.—"*A lamentation for the princes of Israel.*" Ezekiel follows up his predictions of approaching judgment and his exhortations to repentance with an elegy on the distresses of the princes of Israel.

I. THE FATE OF THE PRINCES STIRRED DEEP FEELINGS. It became the inspiration of an ode. True poetry has its fountains in deep emotion. Thus a living religion naturally finds expression in song, and the spiritual experience of men is uttered in psalms. That religion which is satisfied with the cold statements of intellectual propositions has not yet touched the heart, and is no living experience. There is a fire of passion in true devotion. On the other hand, when religion has been neglected or outraged, a new range of emotions is called into play, and the fate of sinners stirs feelings of profound grief in all who understand its dire distress and have brotherly hearts to sympathize with others. The Book of Lamentations may be taken as the reverse of the Book of Psalms. Psalmists celebrate the emotions of true religion; the "Lamentations" is a dirge sung over those who have been unfaithful to their religion. In any case, man's relation to religion is so intimate and vital that it should rouse deep feelings in the heart of every one.

II. THE FATE OF THE PRINCES CONTAINED PECULIAR ELEMENTS OF DISTRESS. 1. *The princes enjoyed high rank.* When they fell, their humiliation and suffering were all the greater. Men envy high stations; but such positions are liable to peculiar calamities, from which the lowly do not suffer. (1) High positions attract attention. Princes are aimed at when peasants are neglected. The leading families were torn from their homes and carried off to Babylon, while the obscure sons of the soil were left to till their fields. (2) High rank is no sure protection. A body-guard surrounds princes. But no guard can ward off the judgment of Heaven. God will judge the great as surely as the low. 2. *The princes came of a divinely favoured line.* They belonged to the house of David—a house which had long enjoyed peculiar marks of God's favour, and which was thought to be sheltered by promises of everlasting prosperity (*e.g.* Ps. lxix.). But no favouritism of Heaven will protect against the consequences of sin. God's promises of grace are conditioned by man's fidelity. 3. *The ruin of the princes was in itself most lamentable.* They did not suffer from some temporary reverse of fortune. One after another they were flung down from the throne and degraded to a miserable fate. The consequences of sin are heavy and disastrous. No soul can face them with equanimity. 4. *The fate of the princes involved the sufferings of their people.* The princes, being leaders in sin, were first in punishment. Their primacy of guilt was followed by a primacy of doom. But others suffered also in various degrees, and the nation was involved in calamities. Thus the responsibility of those in high stations is enlarged by the fact that they bring trouble upon many by their misdeeds.

Vers. 1—9.—*The parable of the lion's whelps.* I. THE LION-LIKE CHARACTER OF ISRAEL. This character was especially given to the tribe of Judah, from which the royal family came (Gen. xlix. 9). There should be something of the better nature of the lion in the people of God. 1. *Strength.* With one blow of his paw the lion can break the neck of a bull. The nation of Israel was strong. The Church of God is strong with the might of God. God does not only save his children as weak creatures needing his shelter; he inspires them with strength. 2. *Freedom.* The lion is not a domestic animal, trained to wear the yoke like the patient ox. When he is caught and caged his proud spirit is broken. In a state of nature he roams at large over the desert. God gives liberty to his people. They are not his slaves; they are his free men. 3. *Rule.* The lion is regarded as the king of the forest. Israel in her greatness ruled over her neighbours politically; but spiritually she has since extended that rule over the civilized world. There is power and a ruling influence over minds in the Church of Christ. 4. *Majesty.* The lion looks more brave than he is. His lordly mane and noble bearing, and the thunder of his roar that echoes through the woods at night, impress men with a sense of awe. God has called his people to a position of greatness and honour.

II. THE FATE OF THE TWO WHELPS. 1. *The disastrous fate of the first whelp.* Jehoahaz behaves ill, and is carried in chains to Egypt (2 Kings xxiii. 32—34). (1) His great sin is that he worked destruction. "It devoured men." Sin is hurtful to others as well as to the sinner. When a man is in a position of power and influence this is especially the case. But "no man liveth unto himself." We are responsible for the harm done by our sin. (2) His punishment is loss of liberty and banishment. The lion is taken in a pit, shackled with chains, and carried off to Egypt. Power to work ill will not last for ever. The liberty that is abused in sin will be taken away. They who are unfaithful to God will be banished from God's inheritance. 2. *The similar fate of the second whelp.* Jehoahaz is followed by Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, not only on the throne, but in evil conduct and in consequent punishment. (1) There is a succession in sin. This is not by natural inheritance nor by inevitable fate, but by a gathering together of various common influences, especially that of example. Yet the fate of former sinners should be a warning to their successors. Men are too ready to copy the misdeeds of predecessors, without waiting to consider the consequences of those misdeeds. (2) There will be a succession in punishment. The resources of judgment are not exhausted. The hand that smote Israel is strong to smite a faithless Christendom. The form of the punishment may vary, but the essence of it will be unchanged. Jehoahaz was sent to Egypt, Jehoiachin to Babylon; but the doom of the two was essentially the same. Moreover, in both cases, as the villagers assemble in a circle to catch a destructive lion, the neighbouring nations joined in the work of Egypt and Babylon. Sinners make many enemies.

Vers. 10—14.—*The parable of the destruction of the vine.* The Jews have often been compared to a vine well cared for by God, and the same comparison, on our Lord's authority, may be applied to Christians. In the present case we have a description first of the prosperity of the vine, and then of the devastating ruin of it.

I. THE PROSPERITY OF THE VINE. 1. *It was planted by the waters.* Thus it was well nourished and refreshed. God cares for his children, and supplies their wants. The river of the water of life is for their refreshment. They cannot charge their sin to any failing in God's grace. 2. *It was fruitful.* The early history of Israel shows that the people of God could give some return in service and holy living. God's people have borne fruit in works of zeal and charity. This fruitfulness is what is most looked for in the vine (John xv. 5). 3. *It was well developed.* "Full of branches." Israel grew in population. The Church has grown in numbers. External prosperity has been seen in the visible enlargment of Christendom. 4. *It was influential.* Its branches were so great that they became strong rods for sceptres. Israel exerted royal influence. The Church has been high in power. Weakness and limitation of influence cannot be pleaded as excuses for the neglect of her mission. 5. *It was honoured.* "Her stature was exalted among the thick branches." The vine grew in height as well as in the breadth of her extending branches. Israel stood high. The Church has received her full mead of honour.

III. THE RUIN OF THE VINE. All this former excellence did not prevent a furious vengeance from falling upon the vine. Israel's glorious history did not save her from the doom of her sins. The past of the Church will be no shield from the judgment which must fall on her present or future faithlessness. The vine was grievously hurt. 1. *It was plucked up.* Israel was driven into exile. The sinner will lose his old privileges. 2. *It was cast to the ground.* In place of the previous exaltation of its lordly branches, there is to be a shameful humiliation as they are torn down and strewn over the ground. 3. *Its fruit was dried up.* Old good deeds are forgotten in later sin. When the soul is down in shame and mire, there is no longer power or opportunity to perform the old useful service. 4. *Its sceptre-like rods were destroyed*—broken, withered, and consumed by fire. Power departs with the loss of the old position and prosperity. The fallen Church loses influence. 5. *It is planted in the wilderness.* The poor plant is left there to languish for lack of water and nourishing soil. The doom of sin is to shrivel up and fade away in a spiritual wilderness. 6. *The worst fate comes from the vine upon itself.* The fire proceeds from a rod of her own branches. The royal family of Israel brought down destruction on the nation. The sins of the Church produce its desolation. The fire of judgment that consumes each sinner springs from his own evil heart.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—9.—*The downfall of the princes.* For the interpretation of this figurative and poetical portion of Ezekiel's prophecies, reference must be made to the close of the Second Books of Kings and of Chronicles, where the obscure and humiliating history of the last days of the monarchy of Judah is briefly recorded. Ezekiel's dirge concerns partly what had already taken place, and partly what was immediately about to happen. The lessons to be learnt from the history and the lamentation are of a general character. The fate of the kings—if so they may be called—Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, is certainly instructive. But it would not be just to separate between the rulers and the ruled, both of whom alike "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord."

I. THE ROYAL ORIGIN AND DIGNITY OF THE PRINCES. They are compared to lions, nourished by the lioness their dam, among the whelps. Sprung from the royal stock, and acknowledged as being in the succession, they occupied in due time the throne of their fathers. This arrangement was in fulfilment of the promise made by Jehovah to David, that there should not fail a man to sit upon the throne of the royal bard.

II. THE MISUSE BY THE PRINCES OF THEIR POWERS. It is natural that the young lion should catch its prey and even devour men. But when the princes are compared to such bloodthirsty and carnivorous beasts, it is implied that they were in the habit of oppressing and robbing their subjects, and treating them with violence and cruelty. As a matter of fact, the two princes referred to did conduct themselves in a tyrannical and unjust manner.

III. THE FATE WHICH THE PRINCES PREPARED FOR THEMSELVES. The nations are described by the poet-prophet as hearing of the ravening of the lions, and as setting themselves against them, spreading a net, digging a pit, and, by the use of customary devices, taking the noxious marauder. The first-mentioned prince was taken captive into Egypt, the second to Babylon. They are depicted as led in chains, as put in ward, and of the second it is poetically observed that "his voice was no more heard upon the mountains of Israel." As far as history enables us to judge, these princes met with the reward due to their ungodliness, violence, rapacity, and treachery.

IV. THE NEGLECT OF ONE OF THE PRINCES TO LEARN AND TAKE WARNING BY THE FATE OF THE OTHER. Whether if Jehoiachin had been wise, and had learned the lesson publicly pronounced by the doom of Jehoahaz, he might have escaped ruin, we cannot tell. But by disregarding that lesson he sealed his fate. How often it happens in human affairs that the most obvious and powerful lesson, enforced by striking actual examples, makes no impression upon the mind of the young, self-willed and irreligious!

V. A PRACTICAL AND IMPORTANT LESSON IS THUS CONVEYED TO ALL WHO ARE CALLED BY PROVIDENCE TO GOVERN THEIR FELLOW-MEN. 1. Princes should not rely upon their high descent, their birth, their ancestral claims to respect. 2. Princes should not use their power and the influence of their station for their own personal emoluments or pleasures. 3. Princes should be wise, and order their doings by the precepts of Divine righteousness. 4. Princes should remember the instability of thrones and the uncertainty of life and prosperity, and accordingly should be diligent in their endeavours for the public good.—T.

Vers. 10—14.—*The downfall of the city.* The transition is a bold one, from the figure of the lioness's whelps to that of the vine with its pride of growth and its clusters of fruit, and anon as withered and scorched and ready to perish. Little is there of tenderness or of sympathy in the prophet's view of the degenerate scions of the royal house of Judah. But when he comes to speak of Jerusalem, a sweeter similitude rises before his vision; it is the vine that grew and flourished on the sunny slopes of Judah, in all its fairness and fruitfulness, now, alas! to be plucked up, cast down, broken, withered, and consumed with fire.

I. JERUSALEM IN HER GLORY. 1. The city was well placed upon her hills; as the vine by the waters that nourish and cheer the noble plant in the heat and drought of summer. 2. The city was noble of aspect; even as the vine of exalted stature, as she appears in her height with the multitude of her branches. 3. The city was strong in her sway; as the vine with her vigorous and pliant rods "for the sceptres of them that bear rule." 4. The city was fruitful in great men and great thinkers and great deeds; even as the vine that bears abundant clusters of rich grapes. There is fondness and pride in these references to the sacred and beloved metropolis.

II. JERUSALEM IN HER DESOLATION. It would seem that Ezekiel, foreseeing what is about to come to pass, speaks of the ruin of the city as if already accomplished. The vine in its wealth of foliage and of fruit is the picture of the memory; the vine in its destruction is the sad vision of the immediate future, and the foreboding seems a fact. 1. The city itself is besieged, taken, and dismantled. 2. The chief inhabitants are either slain or led away into banishment. 3. The princes are deprived of their power. 4. The city's prosperity and pride, wealth and prowess, are all at an end.

III. Jerusalem lamented. The spectacle of a famous metropolis, the seat of historic government and of a consecrated temple, reduced to helplessness and disgrace, is a spectacle not to be beheld without emotion. We are reminded of the language in which an English poet represents the Roman conqueror, centuries afterwards, lamenting the sad but inevitable fate of Jerusalem:—

> "It moves me, Romans;
> Confounds the counsel of my firm philosophy,
> That Ruin's merciless ploughshare should pass o'er
> And barren salt be sown on yon proud city!"

Application. 1. The transitoriness and mutability of earthly greatness are very impressively brought before us in this passage. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* 2. Eminence and privilege are no security against the operation of righteous law. 3. Repentance and obedience are the only means by which it may be hoped that advantages will be retained, and further opportunities of useful service afforded.—T.

Vers. 1—9.—*Kingly power abused.* Without doubt, the main cause of Israel's fall was the waywardness and vice of her kings. With few exceptions, they gave themselves up to evil ways. Corruption at the fountain-head became corruption in all the streams of national and domestic life. Idolatry was the root; and tyranny, anarchy, violence, and cruelty were the branches. This soon became intolerable to the surrounding nations.

I. Kingly power was intended as a benefit. What the shepherd is to his flock, the king should be to his people. He is intended to live and think and plan for their good. Wisdom, not self-will, ought to be his supreme counsellor. As an army cannot succeed without a commander; as a ship cannot voyage prosperously without a pilot; as a family cannot do well without a parent; so a kingdom must have a ruler. The administration of justice and of defence must have a living head. The appointment of a king, whether he be human or Divine, is a necessity for a nation's prosperity; and *that* king will be either a blessing or a curse.

II. Kingly power may become selfish. The man who is exalted to the highest place of honour is so exalted that he may serve the nation. But, in a measure, he holds an irresponsible office. There is no higher power which can control or restrain him. Hence there is a great temptation for the abuse of office. The man may use his power to aggrandize himself, to increase his pleasures or his magnificence. Setting aside prudence, wisdom, benevolent regard for others, he may become arrogant, self-willed, tyrannical. The lower appetites of his nature may rule *him*, and the effect will be as if a beast ruled the people. Though a lion is chief among wild animals, he is but a beast still; and the worst features of the untamed lion were manifest in the kings of Israel and of Judah.

III. Kingly power, if selfish, becomes destructive. This young lion learnt "to catch prey, it devoured men." He who was set over the people to preserve life, to afford protection to their interests, perverted his high office, destroyed those he was appointed to save. The king is set in the stead of God, to reward obedience, and to punish transgression; by the abuse of his office he becomes an Apollyon, an ally of Satan. He destroys his people's peace, destroys their fortunes, destroys their lives. His misrule encourages violence on the highways, private murder, civil war, foreign invasion. An evil king is a fount of death—the nation's executioner.

IV. Kingly power, when abused, must be fettered. "The nations set against him on every side . . . and spread their net over him: he was taken in their pit." He who is unjust and violent in dealing with his own people will be unjust and insolent in dealing with surrounding nations. But neighbouring kings are more free to resent and punish royal insolence than are the subjects of the monarch. Hence it often happens that retribution comes from the mutual consent of foreigners. There is One who rules among the nations, higher that the highest king, and he can employ a thousand methods to restrain and chastise a tyrant. At times God employs the subjects of the realm; sometimes he employs death; sometimes he employs a foreign army—a foreign league. It is a perilous thing to tamper with righteousness.—D.

Vers. 10—14.—*A nation's rise and fall.* If the emblem chosen to represent the Hebrew kings was a lion, "the lion of the tribe of Judah," the emblem of the nation was a vine. The vine was indigenous in the land; the whole territory was a vineyard. As the vine is chief among trees for fruitfulness, so Israel, on account of superior advantage, was expected to be chief among the nations for spiritual productiveness. The fruits of piety and righteousness ought to have abounded on every branch.

I. Her fame. 1. *It was a vine of the noblest quality.* Her sap was rich; like blood. She was of the choicest sort. Abraham was the parent-stock, and Abraham was the highest kind of man—"the friend of God." 2. *This vine was well situated.* Of all lands God had chosen Canaan for the abode of his people. It had been chosen by unerring Wisdom, and prepared by omnipotent power. It lay central among the nations; it had natural excellence; it was the glory of all lands. Sharon and Carmel and Lebanon are still the synonyms for splendid fertility. 3. *This vine actually flourished.* "Her stature was exalted." "She had strong rods." Prosperity was not only possible; it was matter of fact. The vine bare prolifically. During the reigns of David and Solomon the people enjoyed an enviable prosperity. Wealth increased. Knowledge spread. Religion flourished. The people thronged to offer sacrifices. The sabbath was a delight. A magnificent temple was erected. The Jewish empire grew. Surrounding nations honoured the people that God had so signally blessed. Peace abounded in the land. There was contentment, order, plenty, national fame. Such rapid progress had never been known. What had been thus gained could have been maintained. The vine that has so nobly borne fruit can bear fruit still.

II. Her folly. The fault of Israel is here rather implied than expressed. Her sin was unfruitfulness. Instead of pruning the rank branches of this vine, the husbandmen allowed them to grow; and soon all the strength of the tree ran out in branch and leaf. Instead of caring for clusters of holy fruit, "she had strong rods for the sceptres of them that bare rule." The nation was bent rather upon display, showy magnificence, military glory, than upon the works of righteousness and religion. The rank and luxuriant growths of idolatry took the place of fruitful piety. There was a fever of self-exaltation. The people imagined they could live upon their past fame. The kings became incarnations of selfishness, and the people, like a flock of sheep, eagerly followed the base example. Unfruitfulness was her folly and her curse. A vine is worse than useless unless it bears fruit; and Israel was worse than useless in the world when she threw aside her loyalty to God.

III. Her fall. "She was plucked up in fury." A storm swept over her, which rooted her out of the ground. Here is depicted: 1. *The vine's prostrate state.* It was laid low. This is a graphic description of Israel's defeat in war. In David's day, no neighbouring king dared to whisper any defiance to Israel; now every surrounding army had made raids upon her territory and despoiled her possessions. The capitals, Jerusalem and Samaria, had been besieged and captured. 2. *Demolition of the strong branches.* The royal sceptre was broken. At this moment the king was a vassal, under tribute to the King of Babylon. Kingly rule was only a shadow and a pretence. Every strong arm in Judæa was withered. 3. *The element of destruction had issued out of itself.* "A fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit." This language implies that it was the sin of her kings that brought about this terrible downfall. Had it not been for internal vice and folly, no foreign foe could have done Israel harm. For the arm of Jehovah was round about her. Sin has always the seed of punishment within itself. The fire came from within. 4. *Yet there is a circumstance of hope.* The vine is not left prostrate—unrooted. The Divine Husbandman has intentions of future kindness. The vine shall again be planted in the land of Israel; meanwhile "it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty ground." This precludes despair. This preservation of the vine nourishes hope. But compared with former favours and privileges, this captivity is a barren wilderness. Bare preservation of life is all that can there be expected. Such disaster is fitting theme for human lamentation. What material for sorrow is supplied by wanton guilt!—D.

Vers. 1—9.—*A lamentation for fallen princes.* "Moreover, take thou up a lamentation for the princes of Israel, and say, What was thy mother?" etc. Here are three preliminary inquiries. 1. *Who is addressed by the prophet?* Or, whom are we to understand by the pronoun "thy"? "What was thy mother?" "Jehoiachin is addressed," says the 'Speaker's Commentary.' Hengstenberg says, "The address is to the man Judah, the people of the present." And Schröder, "The address is directed to the people." But, as we shall see, the people are probably represented by the lioness; and if such be the case, it is hardly congruous to say that they are addressed in the pronoun "thy;" for that would represent them at once as the "mother" and the offspring. 2. *Who is represented by "thy mother, a lioness"?* According to Schröder, "the mother of the people is Jerusalem" (cf. Gal. iv. 25, *seq.*; Lam. i. 1). The general opinion is that the mother represents the people of Judah or of the whole Israel. Hengstenberg, "The mother is the people in itself." Matthew Henry, "He must compare the kingdom of Judah to a lioness." Scott, "The Jewish Church and nation is represented under the image of a lioness." 'Speaker's Commentary,' "The people represented by Judah." 3. *Who are represented by the two whelps?* (Vers. 3, 5.) It is generally agreed that by them are set forth the two princes for whom this lamentation is made, and that by the first whelp which "became a young lion" is signified Jehoahaz (2 Kings xxiii. 30). But opinion is divided as to whether the other whelp which was "made a young lion" represents Jehoiakim or Jehoiachin. Hengstenberg, Schröder, and the 'Speaker's Commentary' say that it was Jehoiachin, for this amongst other reasons, that he "was not appointed by a foreign prince out of order, like his father Jehoiakim, but succeeded regularly with the consent of the people (2 Kings xxiv. 6)." But it is difficult to see how vers. 6 and 7 can be applied to him, seeing that he reigned only three months and ten days (2 Chron. xxxvi. 9). On the other hand, if we take vers. 5—9 as applying to Jehoiakim, then the ninth verse presents this difficulty, that it represents the prince as being carried into Babylon as a prisoner, and there brought into strongholds, and his voice never more heard upon the mountains of Israel; whereas it is said in 2 Kings xxiv. 6 that "Jehoiakim slept with his fathers;" and in Jer. xxii. 19, "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." But, as Dr. Milman remarks, "There is much difficulty about the death of Jehoiakim;" for in addition to the statements just quoted from 2 Kings and Jeremiah, in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6 it is said that Nebuchadnezzar "bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon." Whether we conclude that Jehoiakim or Jehoiachin is referred to in vers. 5—9, difficulties meet us which perhaps at present cannot be completely cleared away. On the three questions at which we have glanced, the following remarks of Greenhill are deserving of quotation: "It is said 'thy mother' in reference to each prince. Jehoahaz, 'what is thy mother?' Jehoiakim, 'what is thy mother?' By 'mother' here is meant Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah. Great cities and kingdoms are in a metaphorical sense mothers; they bring forth kings; they elect, crown, and set them up to rule." But leaving questions of disputed interpretation, let us look at those aspects or illustrations of historical and moral truths which this lamentation sets forth. We discover here—

I. ROYAL POSITION AND POWER SYMBOLIZED. "What was thy mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her whelps." "The people appears as a lioness," says Hengstenberg, "on the ground of Gen. xlix. 9, to which passage the couching in particular refers (cf. Numb. xxiii. 24; xxiv. 9; Isa. xxix. 1), because it was a royal people, of equal birth with other independent and powerful nations, as this royal nature was historically displayed, especially in the times of David and Solomon. . . . The whelps of the mother are the sons of the King of Israel. The bringing up of these among lions points to the fact that the kingdom of Israel was of equal birth with the mighty kingdoms of the heathen world." And Schröder says excellently, "That she 'lay down' among the neighbouring royal states betokens majestic repose and conscious security—the fearless one exciting fear by imposing power." The power and prosperity thus indicated were especially realized during the later years of the reign of David and the greater portion of that of Solomon. Of this we have evidence in 1 Chron. xiv. 17; xxiv. 26—28; 2 Chron. ix.

II. ROYAL POSITION AND POWER ABUSED. "And she brought up one of her whelps; he became a young lion: and he learned to catch the prey, he devoured men." The young lion is intended to represent Jehoahaz, who was raised to the throne by the people (2 Kings xxiii. 30). "He was an impious man," said Josephus, "and impure in his course of life." "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done" (2 Kings xxiii. 32). And, according to our text, during his brief reign he abused his kingly power by oppressing his subjects. Then we have the abuse of kingly power in another sovereign (vers. 5—7). If we take this as referring to Jehoiakim, it is difficult to see how it can be appropriately said that "she took another of her whelps, and made him a young lion," seeing that he was raised to the throne by Pharaoh-Necho (2 Kings xxiii. 34). But in other respects the description here given suits him well (cf. vers. 6, 7 with 2 Kings xxiii. 35—37). Josephus says that "he was of a wicked disposition, and ready to do mischief: nor was he either religious towards God or good-natured towards men" ('Ant.,' x. 5. 2). Again, if we translate ver. 7 as in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' "he knew his palaces" (both Hengstenberg and Schröder translate "his" in this clause, and not "their" as in the Authorized Version), the reference to Jehoiakim becomes yet more clear; for he had a passion for building splendid edifices, and he gratified it by injustice and oppression (Jer. xxii. 13—19). By both these princes their position and power were wickedly abused. Rank and might should be used in accordance with the will of God and for the good of man. Kings should employ their power for the protection and prosperity of their subjects.

"Since by your greatness you
Are nearer heaven in place, be nearer it
In goodness. Rich men should transcend the poor,
As clouds the earth; raised by the comfort of
The sun, to water dry and barren grounds."
(Tourneive.)

But these princes used their power for the oppression and impoverishment of their subjects.

"When those whom Heaven distinguishes o'er millions,
Profusely gives them honour, riches, power,
Whate'er the expanded heart can wish; when they,
Accepting the reward, neglect the duty,
Or worse, pervert those gifts to deeds of ruin,
Is there a wretch they rule so mean as they,—
Guilty at once of sacrilege to Heaven,
And of perfidious robbery to men?"
(Mallet.)

III. Royal position and power taken away. "The nations also heard of him; he was taken in their pit, and they brought him with chains unto the land of Egypt" (cf. 2 Kings xxiii. 31—34). There is here "an allusion to the custom, when the news arrives that a lion or other savage beast is committing mischief, of assembling on all sides to seize and slay it" (C. B. Michaelis). The "chains," "hooks," or "rings," by which Jehoahaz is said to have been brought into Egypt, refer to the custom of putting a ring "through the nose of animals that require to be restrained, to attach to it the bridle by which they are led, by which also their power of breathing can be lessened" (cf. 2 Kings xix. 28). Jehoiakim also was stripped of the power which he had abused. "The nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him," etc. (vers. 8, 9). The historical explanation is given in 2 Kings xxiv. 1, 2; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 5, 6. Or, if vers. 8 and 9 be applied to Jehoiachin, we have their explanation in 2 Kings xxiv. 10—16. When kings and princes abuse their power, in the providence of God it is taken away from them. Many examples of this might be cited; as Saul (1 Sam. xxxi.), Zimri (1 Kings xvi. 8—20), Jehoram (2 Chron. xxi.), Manasseh (2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—11). And, as Greenhill says, "Tiberius was poisoned or smothered by his own nephew; Caligula slain by his own guard; Vitrellius was overthrown in battle, taken prisoner, and drawn with a halter about his neck along the streets, half naked, and after many outrages done unto him, he was killed and cast into the Tiber. Leander, tyrant of Cyrena, was taken alive, and being sewed into a leathern bag, was cast into the sea. Thirty tyrants were slain in one day at Athens, by Theramenes, Thrasibulus, and Archippus, who did it with seventy men." The measure they had meted unto others was measured also unto them. As they had done, so God requited them. These things call for lamentation on the part of the patriotic and the pious. When splendid opportunities are worse than neglected and exalted position and power are grievously abused, and princes oppress their people, the wise and good do mourn. National sins and calamities should awaken the sorrow of all lovers of their God and country.—W. J.

Vers. 10—14.—*National prosperity and national ruin.* "Thy mother is like a vine in thy blood, planted by the waters," etc. This paragraph completes the lamentation for the princes of Israel. The figure is changed from the lioness and the young lions to the vine and its branches and fruit. This similitude is frequently used in the sacred Scriptures to represent the people of Israel (ch. xv.; xvii. 5—10; Ps. lxxx. 8—16; Isa. v. 1—7; Jer. ii. 21). The parable before us presents two pictures.

I. A PICTURE OF NATIONAL PROSPERITY. (Vers. 10, 11.) 1. *Some features of national prosperity.* (1) Favourable circumstances. "A vine planted by the waters." Palestine, the land of the chosen people, was very favourably situated in many respects. It was almost completely surrounded by natural fortifications. On their northern frontier were the ranges of Lebanon; from their southern frontier "stretched that 'great and terrible wilderness,' which rolled like a sea between the valley of the Nile and the valley of the Jordan." On the east they were guarded by the eastern desert and by "the vast fissure of the Jordan valley;" and on the west by the Mediterranean, which, "when Israel first settled in Palestine, was not yet the thoroughfare—it was rather the boundary and the terror of the Eastern nations." And to the Western world the coast of Palestine opposed an inhospitable front.[1] Moreover, the land in which this vine was planted was remarkable for its fertility (cf. Numb. xiii. 27; Deut. viii. 7—9). Palestine, says Dean Stanley, "not merely by its situation, but by its comparative fertility, might well be considered the prize of the Eastern world, the possession of which was the mark of God's peculiar favour; the spot for which the nations would contend; as on a smaller scale the Bedouin tribes for some 'diamond of the desert,' some 'palm-grove islanded amid the waste.' And a land of which the blessings were so evidently the gift of God, not as in Egypt of man's labour; which also, by reason of its narrow extent, was so constantly within reach and sight of the neighbouring desert, was eminently calculated to raise the thoughts of the nation to the Supreme Giver of all these blessings, and to bind it by the dearest ties to the land which he had so manifestly favoured." (2) Efficient rulers. "She had strong rods for the sceptre of them that bare rule." "There grew up in Jerusalem-Judah strong shoots of David, able to rule (Gen. xlix. 10)." All her kings were not eminent either for capability or character; but some of them certainly were; *e.g.* David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah. (3) Manifest progress. "She was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters. . . . Her stature was exalted among the thick branches, and she appeared in her height with the multitude of her branches." In the time of David and Solomon great was the prosperity of the nation (cf. 1 Chron. xiv. 17; xxix. 26—28; 2 Chron. ix.). Even under Zedekiah (as we pointed out on ch. xvii. 5, 6) an encouraging measure of progress and prosperity might have been attained if he had remained faithful to his engagements with the King of Babylon. 2. *The great source of national prosperity.* "She was fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters." "The many waters," says Hengstenberg, "signify the Divine blessing which ruled over Israel, the rich influx of grace." The Israelites in a special sense owed their national existence and power and prosperity to Jehovah their God. And in all times and places true and lasting national prosperity can only be attained by compliance with the Law of God and realization of his blessing. "Righteousness exalteth a nation," etc.; "The throne is established by righteousness;" "The God of Israel, he giveth strength and power unto his people." He also "bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity."

II. A PICTURE OF NATIONAL RUIN. (Vers. 12—14.) Schröder calls attention to the sudden transition from the description of the prosperity of this vine to the declaration of its destruction. "Without the intervention of anything further, there follows its splendid growth, like a lightning-flash from the clear heavens, the complete overthrow of the vine, *i.e.* of Jerusalem-Judah, the birthplace of kings, and therewith the Davidic kingdom." 1. *Some features of this ruin.* (1) Favourable circumstances are exchanged for adverse ones. Formerly she was "planted by the waters;" and now she is "planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land." The expression is figurative, setting forth their exile as a condition opposed to their growth and prosperity. "Such a wilderness may even be in the midst of a cultivated land." In some respects, "Babylon was as a wilderness to those of the people that were carried captive thither." They had lost their national life, their ancestral estates, many of their religious privileges, etc. (2) Efficient rulers are no more. "Her strong rods were broken and withered; the fire consumed them. . . . She hath no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule." The words, perhaps, refer to Zedekiah and his miserable overthrow (2 Kings xxv. 4—7). And there was no one to retrieve their fallen fortunes, or to reign efficiently over the remnant of them that was left in the land (cf. Isa. iii. 6—8). (3) Manifest progress is exchanged for desolation and ruin. "She was plucked up in fury, she was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up her fruit. . . . And fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit." The commentary on these clauses we have in 2 Kings xxv. 8—26; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 17—20; Jer. lii. 12—30; and in Lamentations. 2. *The instrument of this ruin.* "The east wind dried up her fruit" (cf. ch. xvii. 10; Hos. xiii. 15). The east wind points to the Chaldeans as the instrument of the Divine judgment. The figure is appropriate, both because the Chaldeans dwelt in the east, and because the east wind is often injurious to vegetable life. 3. *The cause of this ruin.* "Fire is gone out of a rod of her branches, which hath devoured her fruit." "The fire goes out from the chief stem of the branches: it does not take its rise from the Chaldees, but proceeds from the royal family itself, which by its crimes called down the Divine vengeance." It was Zedekiah, by his base treachery towards Nebuchadnezzar, that at last brought on the ruin (ch. xvii. 15—21). "The desolation of kingdoms," says Greenhill, "usually have been by their own kings and rulers, by those they have brought forth and set up; their follies, cruelties, treacheries, have fired and consumed their kingdoms."

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[1] Dr. Stanley's 'Sinai and Palestine,' ch. ii.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Prosperity, both individual and national, is of God.* 2. *Ruin, both individual and national, is self-caused.* "The fire of one's own unrighteousness kindles the wrathful judgment of God." "Men first become parched, then the fire consumes them." "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" 3. *Sin invariably leads to sorrow.* It first causes lamentation to the good, and then leads to general lamentation. Sin may be committed amidst mirth and music, but it will speedily lead to mourning and woe. "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation."—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XX.

Ver. 1.—A new date is given, and includes what follows to ch. xxiii. 49. The last note of time was in ch. viii. 1, and eleven months and five days had passed, during which the prophecies of the intervening chapters had been written or spoken. We may note further that it was two years one month and five days after the prophet's call to his work (ch. i.), and two years and five months before the Chaldeans besieged Jerusalem (ch. xxiv. 1). The immediate occasion here, as in ch. viii. 1, was that some of the elders of Israel had come to the prophet to inquire what message of the Lord he had to give them in the present crisis. Whether any stress is to be laid on the fact that here the elders are said to be "of Israel," and in ch. viii. 1 "of Judah," is doubtful (see note on ch. xiv. 1). Ezekiel seems to use the two words as interchangeable. Here, however, it is stated more definitely that they came to inquire, probably in the hope that he would tell them, as other prophets were doing, that the time of their deliverance, and of that of Jerusalem, was at hand. Passing into the prophetic state, Ezekiel delivers the discourse that follows.

Ver. 3.—**As I live, saith the Lord God, etc.** The inquirers are answered, but not as they expected. Instead of hearing of the "times and seasons" of the events that were in the near future, the prophet at once enters on his stern work as a preacher. The general principle that determines the refusal to answer has been given in ch. xiv. 3.

Ver. 4.—**Wilt thou judge them, etc.?** The doubled question has the force of a strong imperative. The prophet is directed, as it were, to assume the office of a judge, and as such to press home upon his hearers, and through them upon others, their own sins and those of their fathers. He is led, in doing so, to yet another survey of the nation's history; not now, as in ch. xvi., in figurative language, but directly.

Vers. 5, 6.—In the day that I lifted up mine hand. The attitude was that of one who takes an oath (Exod. vi. 8), and implies the confirmation of the covenant made with Abraham. The land flowing with milk and honey appears first in Exod. iii. 8, and became proverbial. The glory of all lands is peculiar to Ezekiel. Isaiah (xiii. 19) applies the word to Babylon.

Vers. 7—10.—No special mention of the idols of Egypt occurs in the Pentateuch, but it lies, in the nature of the case, that this was the form of idolatry implied in the second commandment, and the history of the "golden calf" (Exod. xxxii. 4) shows that they had caught the infection of the Mnevis or Apis worship while they sojourned in Egypt. Here apparently the prophet speaks of that sojourn prior to the mission of Moses. In bold anthropomorphic speech he represents Jehovah as half purposing to make an end of the people there and then, and afterwards repenting. He wrought for his Name's sake, that the deliverance of the Exodus might manifest his righteousness and might, the attributes specially implied in that Name, to Egypt and the surrounding nations. They should not have it in their power to say that he had abandoned the people whom he had chosen.

Ver. 11.—I gave them my statutes, etc. Ezekiel recognizes, almost in the very language of Deut. xxx. 16—20, as fully as the writers of Ps. xix. and cxix. recognized, the excellence of the Law. A man who kept that Law in its fulness would have life in its fullest and highest sense. He was beginning, however, to recognize, as Jeremiah had done (Jer. xxxi. 31), the powerlessness of the Law to give that life without the aid of something higher. The "new covenant" was already dawning on the mind of the scholar as on that of the master.

Ver. 12.—I gave them my sabbaths, etc. As in Exod. xxxi. 12—17, the sabbath is treated as the central sign (we might almost say sacrament) of the Jewish Church, not only as a mark differencing them from other nations, but as between Jehovah and them, a witness of their ideal relation to each other, a means of making that ideal relation a reality.

Ver. 13.—It is hardly necessary to count up the several instances of rebellion, from the sin of the golden calf onward. Of direct violation of the sabbath we have but two recorded instances (Exod. xvi. 27; Numb. xv. 32); but the prophet looked below the surface, and would count a mere formal observance, that did not sanctify the sabbath, as a pollution of the holy day. (For parallel teaching in the prophets, see Isa. lvi. 2—4; lviii. 13; Jer. xvii. 21—27; and later on in the history, probably as the result of their teaching, Neh. x. 31—33; xiii. 15—22.) Then I said. The history of Numb. xiv. 26 and xxvi. 65 was probably in Ezekiel's thoughts.

Ver. 16.—Their heart went after their idols. The words may point generally to the fact that the idolatrous tendencies of the people, though suppressed, were not really eradicated. The history of Baal-peor (Numb. xxv. 3—9) shows how ready they were to pass into act, and Amos v. 25, 26 implies a tradition of other like acts during the whole period of the wanderings in the wilderness.

Ver. 18.—I said unto their children, etc. The words can refer to nothing but the great utterance of the Book of Deuteronomy as addressed to the children of those who had perished in the wilderness. That utterance also, it is implied, as indeed the Baal-peor history at the close of the forty years showed, fell on deaf ears. Then also there was, once again, in the inevitable anthropomorphic language, a change of purpose, from that of a rigorous judgment to the mercy which prevailed against it.

Ver. 23.—That I would scatter them among the heathen. The words seem to refer to the generation that had grown up in the wilderness, and, so taken, do not correspond with the history of the conquest of Canaan. What Ezekiel contemplates, however, as the resolve of Jehovah, is the commutation of the sentence of destruction for that of the dispersion of the people, leaving the time and manner of that dispersion to be determined by his own will. Possibly even in the time of the judges, with its many conquests and long periods of oppression, there were instances of such dispersion, and these, with others that would naturally accompany an invasion like that of Shishak (2 Chron. xii. 2—9), not to speak of frequent attacks from Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, Edomites, and Syrians, may have seemed to the prophet the working out, step by step, of the dispersion which culminated in the deportation of the ten tribes by Shalmaneser, and of Judah and Benjamin by Nebuchadnezzar. Traces of such dispersions before Ezekiel's time meet us in Ps. lxxviii. 59—64; Isa. xi. 11, 12; Zeph. iii. 10, 20.

Ver. 25.—I gave them also statutes that were not good, etc. The words have sometimes been understood as though Ezekiel applied these terms to the Law itself, either as speaking of what St. Paul calls its "weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. iv. 9), or as unable to work out the righteousness which it commanded (Rom. iii. 20), and the language of Heb. vii. 19 and x. 1 has been urged in support of this view. One who has studied Ezekiel with any care will not need many words to show that such a conclusion was not in his thoughts at all. For him the Law was "holy and just and good," and its statutes such that a man who should keep them should even live in them (vers. 13, 21). He is speaking of the time that followed on the second publication of that Law, and what he says is that the people who rebelled against it were left, as it were, to a law of another kind. The baser, darker forms of idolatry are described by him, with a grave irony, as statutes and judgments of another kind, working, not life, but death. Sin became, by God's appointment, the punishment of sin, that it might be manifest as exceeding sinful. So Stephen says of Israel that "God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven" (Acts vii. 42). So St. Paul paints the corruptions of the heathen world as the result of God's giving them up to "vile affections" (Rom. i. 24, 25). So in God's future dealings with an apostate form of Christianity, the same apostle declares that "God shall send them strong delusions that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii. 11). Ps. lxxxi. 12 may have been in Ezekiel's thoughts as asserting the same general law.

Ver. 26.—I polluted them through their own gifts. The noun includes all forms of blessing bestowed on Israel—its corn and wine and oil (see ch. xvi. 19, 20), even its sons and daughters, the fruit of the womb, as well as the increase of the earth. (For the prevalence of Moloch-worship, and for the phrase, "pass through," see notes on ch. xvi. 21.) The sins were to bring desolation as their punishment, and then men would learn to know Jehovah as indeed he is.

Ver. 28.—It was a special aggravation of the sin that it was committed in the very land into which they had been brought by the oath (the "hand lifted up") of Jehovah, that it might be a holy land, a witness of the Divine righteousness to the nations round about. The forms of worship include that of the high places, and the thick trees (Isa. lvii. 5; Jer. ii. 20; iii. 6) which witnessed the cultus of the Asherah or of Ashtaroth.

Ver. 29.—What is the high place, etc.? Bamah, in the plural *Bamoth*, was the Hebrew for "high place." At first it was applied to the hill on which some local sanctuary stood (1 Sam. ix. 12; 1 Kings iii. 4), but was gradually extended, after the building of the temple as the one appointed sanctuary, to other places which were looked upon as sacred, and which became the scenes of an idolatrous and forbidden worship. Ezekiel emphasizes his scorn by a conjectural derivation of the word, as if derived from the two words *ba* ("go") and *mah* ("whither"); or, perhaps, *What comes?* (comp. Exod. xvi. 15 for a parallel derivation of the word *marones*). Taking the words in their ordinary sense, they seem to express only a slight degree of contempt. "What, then, is the place to which you go?"—what is the "whither" to which it leads? But I incline (with Ewald and Smend) to see in the word "go into" the meaning which it has in Gen. xvi. 2 and xix. 31, and elsewhere, as a euphemism for sexual union. So later the word "Bamah" becomes a witness that those who worship in the high place go there (as in ver. 30) to commit whoredom literally and spiritually. Its name showed that it was what I have called "a chapel of prostitution" (ch. xvi. 24, 25).

Ver. 30.—Say ye unto the house of Israel, etc. The words are addressed primarily to the elders who had come to consult the prophet (ver. 1), but through them to all their contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. They still in heart and even in deed (comp. Isa. lvii. 4—6, 11, and lxv. 3, as showing the habits of the exiles) clung to the old idolatries. The question for them was whether they would continue to walk in the ways of their fathers. If so, it was true of them, as of the elders, that the Lord to whom they came would not be inquired of by them.

Ver. 32.—That which cometh into your mind, etc. The prophet reads the secret thoughts of the inquirers. If the temple were destroyed, they thought, then the one restraint on the idolatries they loved would be removed. They would be no longer a separate people, and would be free to adopt the cultus of the heathen among whom they lived. If that was not Jehovah's purpose for them, then there must be no destruction of the temple, no dispersion among the nations. They come to Ezekiel to know which of the two alternatives he, as the prophet of Jehovah, has in store, and his answer is that he is bound to neither. They could not abdicate their high position, and would remain under the burden of its responsibilities. Scattered though they might be among the heathen, yet even there the "mighty hand and the stretched-out arm" (we note the phrases as from Deut. iv. 34; v. 15) would hunt them down, and punish them for their iniquities.

Vers. 34, 35.—The prophet's words seem to look beyond the horizon of any fulfilment as yet seen in history, of which the return of the exiles under Zerubbabel was but the pledge and earnest. He contemplates not a return straight from Babylon to Jerusalem, but a gathering from all the countries in which they had been scattered (Isa. xi. 11). When gathered, the whole nation is to be brought into the wilderness of the peoples, bordered by many nations. This may probably point to the great Syro-Arabian desert lying between Babylon and Palestine. This was to be to them what the wilderness of Sinai had been in the time of the Exodus. There Jehovah would plead with them face to face, in the first instance as an accuser. (For face to face, as expressing the direct revelation of Jehovah, see Exod. xxxiii. 11; Deut. v. 4; xxxiv. 10, and elsewhere.)

Ver. 37.—**I will cause you to pass under the rod.** The "rod" (same word as in Ps. xxiii. 4) is primarily that of chastisement, but it is also that of the shepherd who gathers in his flock (ch. xxxiv. 11; Lev. xxvii. 32; Micah vii. 14). **Into the bond of the covenant.** The word for "bond" (only found here in the Old Testament) is probably cognate with that for "fetter" or "bond" (Isa. lii. 2; Jer. v. 5; xxvii. 2). The chastisement was, for those who accepted it, to do its work by restoring the blessings of the covenant which apostasy had forfeited.

Ver. 38.—The thought of the shepherd suggests, as in Matt. xxv. 33, the separation of the sheep from the goats. The land of the restored Israel was to be a land of righteousness, and the rebels were not to enter into it. Was Ezekiel thinking of those who were thus to die in the "wilderness of the peoples" as a counterpart of those who perished in the forty years of the wandering, and did not enter Canaan? Ver. 36 seems to imply that he was looking for a repetition of that history. The solemn fast kept by Ezra by the river of Ahava (Ezra viii. 21—23) may be noted as corresponding, on a small scale, to Ezekiel's expectations.

Ver. 39.—**Go ye, serve every man his idols, etc.** The command comes as with a grave irony. "Be at least consistent. Sin on, if it is your will to sin; but do not make the sin worse by the hypocrisy of an unreal worship, and mix up the name of Jehovah with the ritual of Moloch" (comp. Josh. xxiv. 19, 20). The margin of the Revised Version, with not a few critics (Keil), gives, "but hereafter surely ye shall hearken unto me" ("if not" equivalent to "ye shall," as in the familiar idiom of Ps. xcv. 11, where "if" is equivalent to "shall not"). So taken, the verse looks forward to what follows.

Ver. 40.—From the earlier stage of the restoration the prophet passes on to its completion. The people have come to the mountain of the height of Israel (Micah iv. 1, 2; Isa. ii. 2, 3). Ezekiel sees an Israel that shall at last be worthy of its name, the worship of false gods rooted out for ever. The all of them points to the breaking down of the old division between Israel and Judah (Isa. xi. 13). Jehovah would accept the "heave offering" (same word as in Exod. xxiv. 27; Lev. vii. 14, *et al.*) and other oblations. The fact that Israel itself is said to be the "sweet savour" (Revised Version) which Jehovah accepts (comp. 2 Cor. ii. 15; Eph. v. 2; Phil. iv. 18) suggests a like spiritual interpretation of the other offerings, though the literal meaning was probably dominant in the prophet's own thoughts. The nearest approach to a parallelism in a later age is that presented by Rom. ix.—xi.; but it is noticeable how there St. Paul avoids any words that imply the perpetuation of the temple and its ritual, and confines himself to the spiritual restoration of his brethren according to the flesh. It was given to him to see, what the prophets did not see, that that perpetuation would frustrate the purpose of the restoration; that the temple and its ritual took their places among the things that "were decaying and waxing old," and were ready to vanish away (Heb. viii. 13).

Ver. 41.—**I will be sanctified in you, etc.** God is sanctified when he is manifested and recognized as holy (Lev. x. 3; Numb. xx. 13). That recognition would be the consequence of the restoration of Israel, for then it would be seen, even by the heathen, that the God of Israel had been holy and just and true in his judgments, and that he seeks to make men partakers of his holiness.

Ver. 43.—**And there shall ye remember, etc.** The words stretch far and wide, and throw light on many of the problems that connect themselves with the conversion of the sinner and the eschatology of the Divine government. The whole evil past is still remembered after repentance and forgiveness. There is no water of Lethe, such as the Greeks fabled, such as Dante dreamt of as the condition of entering Paradise ('Purg.,' xxxi. 94—105). The self-loathing and humility which grow out of that memory, the acceptance of all the punishment of the past as less than had been deserved,—these are the conditions and safeguards of the new blessedness. Ezekiel teaches us, *i.e.*, that it is possible to conceive of an eternal punishment, the punishment of memory, shame, self-loathing, as compatible with eternal life. So (in ver. 44) the prophet ends what is perhaps, the profoundest and the noblest of his discourses, his "vindication of the ways of God to man."

Ver. 45.—In the Hebrew the verses that follow form the opening of the next chapter. The Authorized Version follows the LXX., the Vulgate, and Luther. The section has clearly no connection with what has preceded, and, though fragmentary in its character, seems by the words, "set thy face," to connect itself with ch. xxi. 2, and to lead up to it. The words of ver. 45 imply, as always, an interval of silence and repose.

Ver. 46.—**Drop thy word** The verb i

used specially of prophetic utterances (ch. xxi. 2; Amos vii. 6; Micah ii. 6, 11), and stands, therefore, in the Hebrew without an object. **Toward the south.** Three distinct words are used in the Hebrew for the thrice-repeated "south" of the Authorized Version. (1) One which primarily means "the region on the right hand," *sc.* as a man looks to the east, which Ezekiel also uses in ch. xlvii. 19; xlviii. 28); (2) the "shining land," used repeatedly in ch. xl., xlii. (Deut. xxxiii. 23; Job xxxvii. 17; Eccles. i. 6; xi. 3); and (3) the *Négeb*, the "dry" or "parched" land, the South (always in Revised Version with a capital letter), of Josh. xv. 21, and the historical books generally, the region lying to the south of Judah. The use of the three words where one might have sufficed is, perhaps, characteristic of Ezekiel's affluence of diction. The LXX. treats all three as proper names, and transliterates them as *Thaiman*, *Darom*, and *N'ageb*. Against this region and its inhabitants (they, of course, are the "trees") Ezekiel is directed to utter his words of judgment. The parenthesis in the last sentence gives the key to the prophet's cypher-writing. From Ezekiel's standpoint on the Chebar, the whole of Judah is as the forest of the south. The "green tree," as in Ps. i. 1, 2, is the man who is relatively righteous; the "dry tree" is the sinner whose true life is withered; the "fire" the devastation wrought by the Chaldean invaders, as executing the Divine judgment. In our Lord's words in Luke xxiii. 31 we may probably find an echo of Ezekiel's imagery.

Ver. 47.—All faces from the south to the north, etc. The phrase seems, at first, to pass from the figure to the reality. Possibly, however, face may stand for "the outward appearance," the leaves and branches, of the trees. "From the south (*Negeb*) to the north" takes the place of the older "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judg. xx. 1; 1 Sam. iii. 20). Of that "fire" of judgment, it is said, as in our Lord's use of a like imagery, that it shall not be quenched (Mark ix. 43). It shall do its dread work till that work is accomplished.

Ver. 49.—Doth he not speak parables? We can scarcely wonder that Ezekiel's enigmatic words here, as in ch. xv., xvi., and xvii., should have called forth some such expression from his hearers; but he obviously records the whisper which he thus heard, in a tone of sorrow and indignation. It was to him a proof, as a like question was to the Christ (Matt. xv. 16; xvi. 9; Mark viii. 21) a proof that those hearers were yet without understanding. The question was, for those who asked it, an excuse for hardening their hearts against remonstrances which needed no explanation. The indignation was followed by another interval of silence, during which he brooded over their stubbornness, and at last, in ch. xxi. 1, the word of the Lord comes to him, and he speaks "no more in proverbs," but interprets the latest parable even in its details.

HOMILETICS.

Vers. 1—3.—*The silent oracle.* An embassy of elders is sent to Ezekiel to make an inquiry of the Lord through the prophet as to what is to be expected at a new juncture of national affairs, and Ezekiel is instructed to tell them that God will vouchsafe no answer.

I. THOSE WHO REFUSE TO HEAR WHAT GOD DESIRES TO TEACH THEM ARE ANXIOUS FOR LIGHT ON LESS IMPORTANT QUESTIONS. This was the peculiar, the anomalous, position of Israel. God had not been keeping silence. On the contrary, he had been sending repeated messages to his people, and the Prophet Ezekiel had been busy in teaching what God had revealed to him. This was not a time, like that of Samuel, when the word of the Lord was rare. But the people had not cared to receive the Divine messages. Here was Ezekiel's trouble. He had to preach to deaf ears and to exhibit his prophetic signs to blind eyes (ch. xii. 2). The perversity of his audience had driven him to novel and startling symbolical representations of truth in a last, despairing endeavour to arrest attention. And yet even these efforts seemed to have been all in vain. Then there came to him an embassy, innocently ignoring all these neglected oracles, and blandly requesting a Divine answer to certain inquiries of their own. Was there ever a more insolent approach to God? Now, we have a full and rich Divine revelation in the Bible, and especially in the gospel of Christ. Here we may see God's message to man and God's answer to the most momentous inquiries of the soul. Yet there are men who set aside these voices of God, and then plead piteously for light. No doubt these elders of Israel did not wish to be troubled about their sins; they were anxious for light on their fate. They were like those people who discuss the problem of future punishment, and with keen interest, but who are indifferent to the voice of conscience and the Divine call to repentance. Yet there is a pathetic side to this subject. Those who reject God still feel driven to him for refuge in trouble.

II. GOD WILL GIVE NO ANSWER TO THE NEW QUESTIONS OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO GIVE HEED TO HIS WORD ALREADY RECEIVED. We cannot be surprised that Ezekiel's oracle was silenced. Such insolence as that of the elders of Israel could meet with no more gracious reception. 1. *If we refuse to hear God's Word, we must expect to be left in darkness.* Before we cry for more light, let us use the light we have. We may indeed pray for God's Spirit to help our interpretation of the Bible, and having read the written Word we may crave more light still. But first to reject the Divine revelation and then to seek for new light is not the way to receive more truth. 2. *God will not give light to those who harden themselves in impenitence.* The Jews had been charged with sin and called to repentance. They had refused to admit the charge and had declined to repent. Thus they had shut the door against further Divine communications. The spiritual vision is best purged by the tears of penitence. A hard heart is deaf to God's Word. 3. *It is useless to be informed about the future unless we listen to the spiritual teachings of God.* Men resorted to oracles to satisfy idle curiosity or to seek mere worldly guidance. God does not speak for such comparatively worthless ends. We most need spiritual instruction for the guidance of our souls into the way of life. Till we have received and obeyed that instruction any other form of revelation must be irrelevant, distracting, and therefore positively injurious.

Vers. 5—7.—*The elect Israel.* The elect Israel is a type of the people of God, the spiritual Israel. Consider the peculiarities of the one as indications of the special marks of the other.

I. THE WAY IN WHICH ISRAEL WAS MADE AN ELECT NATION. 1. *Chosen by God.* This is the root-idea of election. God chooses his people before they choose him—chooses them out of the multitude, and so constitutes them a separate nation. The grounds of the choice rest with him and need not be divulged. But we may be sure there are grounds, and that these are not capricious. History has revealed one great end of the election of Israel. The nation was chosen in order that it might become the channel of blessing to all nations. So the Church is chosen to be God's means of bringing the gospel to the whole world. 2. *Chosen in a state of degradation.* The Jews were chosen in Egypt. Though promises had been made to the patriarchs centuries earlier, the fulfilment of those promises commenced with God's deliverance from the bondage of Pharaoh. When the people seemed to be most lost they were found by God. When they appeared to be of least value he chose them for himself. The Lord married the castaway child (ch. xvi. 8). Thus God now takes his people in their low estate. 3. *Chosen by deeds of might.* God proved his choice by bringing his people out of bondage. He "lifted up" his "hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob." With God to will is to do. The mighty deeds of God in the plagues and the passage of the Red Sea are outdone by his great work in Christ. In Christ God does not only choose us, he lifts up his hand to save. 4. *Chosen through the revelation of God.* God made known his Name to Israel through Moses (Exod. iii. 15). We must know God to hear his voice. The revelation of Christ goes with the election of God. The chosen are called by means of the gospel.

II. THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH ISRAEL WAS ELECTED. 1. *High privileges.* (1) Deliverance. The Jews were chosen to be delivered from Egypt. God chooses his people, in the first place, in order to save them from their evil condition. Salvation is the first result of election. (2) The possession of Canaan. This "land flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands," was given to Israel by God, not inherited by right, nor won by the sword apart from God's interference. God gives his people the kingdom of heaven here, and the heavenly Canaan hereafter. It is a glorious privilege to be counted among the true people of God; for the fruits of the gospel are sweeter and more satisfying to the soul than the best crops of Palestine to the body. 2. *Holy living.* There was a condition of the Divine election, or rather, a condition on which the continuation of its privileges depended. The Jews were to cast away their idols, as God could endure no rivals. The people had been chosen in their idolatry; but they were required to renounce it. God chooses his people now while they are yet sinners. But his choice means that they must give up their sins, and if they still cleave to them the election will be rendered null and void. The great mercy of God in choosing souls before the souls have turned to him should be sufficient ground to induce all who accept the privileges of the gospel to live up to the standard it sets forth. After God has chosen us to be his people the least we can do is to choose him to be our Portion (Ps. lxxiii. 26).

Ver. 11.—*Law and life.* I. THE LAW WAS GIVEN AS A MINISTER OF LIFE. God vouchsafed his statutes in order that the Jews might live by means of them. Without those ordinances they were in danger of death, for they were sinners, and the fruit of sin is death. Thus we see that the Law was given in mercy. It came as a blessing. It was in its aim a gospel. Nothing can be further from the truth than the notion that it was a rod of chastisement, or even, as some have regarded it, an evil thing, a sort of curse upon sinners. It was not so regarded by the Old Testament saints, who sang hymns in praise of it, and hailed it with language of affection and rapture (*e.g.* Ps. xl. and cxix). 1. *Truth leads to life.* The Law was a revelation of God's eternal verities, without which the soul would perish in the night of its own ignorance. 2. *Righteousness would make for life.* The Law declared the nature of righteousness, and pointed out the path on which it could be pursued. Thus it was an aid to conscience. Further, by its sanctions of menace and promise it urged the careless to walk in that path. 3. *Grace leads to life.* The Law did not exclude all grace. On the contrary, it was given in mercy, and it contained saving provisions in various forms of condescension to human weakness and in the great institution of sacrifices for sin.

II. THE LAW PROVED TO BE A MESSENGER OF DEATH. (See ver. 25). We have come to regard the Law with aversion under the influence of the arguments of St. Paul. Yet he distinctly teaches that the Law was good, but that the perversion of it led to ruin (Rom. vii. 12). 1. *The Law condemns sin.* Before we have sinned it is a friend to warn us against doing wrong, but by sinning we have turned it into an enemy. The warning beacon has thus become an ominous meteor, the sign-post a gallows-tree. That which by its guidance protects the innocent from death, by its judgments condemns the guilty to death (Rom. vii. 10). 2. *The Law is powerless to save from sin.* (1) Its commandments cannot save. They are standards of measurement, not direct powers. Though they urge through conscience, fear, and hope, they only appeal to our nature in its present state. They do not create a new heart. They may drive us to flee from the wrath to come; but they do not provide any refuge. (2) Its sacrifices cannot save. Ceremonial sacrifices could only save from ceremonial sins. In regard to moral guilt these sacrifices could only typify cleansing, not really accomplish it (Ps. li. 16; Heb. x. 4).

III. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS THE ONLY EFFECTUAL WAY OF LIFE. The Law was "weak," though not on account of its own imperfection, but "through the flesh," *i.e.* on account of man's human degradation, so that man did not respond to it. Therefore God sent his Son to bring the salvation which the Law was powerless to produce (Rom. viii. 3). 1. *In Christ we have the gift of life.* (1 John v. 12). Nothing less than death is due under the Law; nothing less than life is given by Christ. This we receive by active regenerating grace, not by the erection of a new standard of morals—the Sermon on the Mount substituted for the Ten Commandments—but by the presence and work of a living Saviour. 2. *This life in Christ does not destroy the glory of the Law.* (1) Christ satisfies the Law in his own Person. (2) He destroys in us the sin which makes the Law our enemy and earns the death-penalty. (3) He gives us his new law of love, his eternal statutes, "which, if a man do, he shall even live in them" (Matt. vii. 24—27; John xv. 10).

Ver. 20.—*The sanctity of the sabbath.* The sabbath was given to Israel as a day of rest for man and beast (Exod. xx. 8—11). But it also had a deeper mystical significance which gave it a peculiar sanctity. It was the sign of Israel, the note by which the chosen people might be marked, the seal of the covenant of Sinai, as circumcision was the seal of the earlier covenant with Abraham. In this particular, of course, the sabbath belonged only to the Jews under the Law, and our neglect of the seventh day and observance of the "Lord's day" are signs that we have passed under a new covenant with a new sanction, seal, and token, viz. that of the communion (Luke xxii. 20).

which therefore takes a place with us corresponding to the sabbath in the Law and circumcision among the patriarchs. Nevertheless, the grounds on which the sabbath was selected as the symbol of the covenant of the Law are wider than the dominion of Israel, and deserve to be inquired into with a view to ascertaining their perpetual significance.

I. THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH WAS ASSOCIATED WITH NATURE. God rested from creation (Gen. ii. 2). This fact is stated in primitive language. But the latest science shows that the course of nature is not a mechanical revolution, but a sort of vital pulsation. Its movement is rhythmic. It goes by shock and pause. It has its work and its rest. Summer activity and winter sleep, day and night, storm and calm, are nature's alternate week-days and sabbaths. We are part of nature, and must observe its methods.

II. THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEEDS OF MAN. "The sabbath was made for man." Therefore man needed the sabbath. 1. *He needed the rest.* Ceaseless toil wears and frets the very fibre of life. Masters and slaves, as well as the beast of burden, were benefited by the Jewish sabbath. We are not under the same formal regulations as those by which Israel was governed. But the conditions of business life in the modern world are so much more exacting than any that can be imagined to belong to the simple pastoral and agricultural life of the ancient Jews, that the requirement of some equivalent to their sabbath must be much stronger with us. 2. *He needed the opportunity for remembering God.* The sabbath was sacred to the covenant. Sunday is sacred to the resurrection of Christ. The congenial thoughts and holy occupations of such a day are helpful.

"The Sundaies of man's life,
Thredded together on time's string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternal, glorious King.
On Sunday heaven's gates stand ope;
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope."
(Geo. Herbert.)

III. THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH WAS ASSOCIATED WITH GOD. God ordained the sabbath; it was typical of his resting; and it was the seal of his covenant with Israel. Thus it was in a threefold sense God's day. Christ has warned us against the formal abuse of its sanctity, and St. Paul has dared to assert a large Christian liberty in regard to it. Anything that makes its use formal savours of the Law, is Judaistic, is anti-Christian. Anything that makes it a day of gloom and repression is even contrary to its old Jewish observance as a festival. But, on the other hand, God has claims of worship. If Sunday is given up to amusement or toil those claims are ignored. It is our duty to give them all possible range in this age of driving secular interests. Thus are we led on to

"The sabbaths of eternity,
One sabbath, deep and wide."
(Tennyson, 'St. Agnes.')

Ver. 35.—*A human wilderness.* I. WHAT IT IS. Israel is to be brought "into the wilderness of the peoples." The wanderings of their fathers was in "a waste howling wilderness" (Deut. xxxii. 10), among the wild beasts and far from the cities and homes of men; but the exile of the nation in Ezekiel's day was a transportation into the midst of the settled populous country of Babylon. Chaldea was no Siberia. Banishment from Canaan did not lead to a return to the freedom and the hardships of a nomadic life. The captive Jews were planted among other nations. Although a strange blight has since fallen upon the scene of the exile, and the ruins of the great cities of the Euphrates have now become a veritable wilderness, haunted by lions and hyenas, those cities were at the height of their prosperity and splendour when the prophet lived and wrote. How, then, could he speak of them as a wilderness? 1. *A great city is a human wilderness.* The greater the city, the more desolate is the wilderness. The social life of small cities like Jerusalem and Athens must have been strong and pleasant

But this life is swamped in the myriads of unknown faces that one sees in a vast city. Great Babylon, Rome, and London—the modern Babylon—have the character of a wilderness. 2. *There is no banishment so terrible as that of being lost in a human wilderness.* People who could be tracked over Dartmoor and among the fells of Yorkshire may be utterly lost in London. Every year there are many broken lives that go down in the awful misery that floods the lower parts of a great city, and no one misses them. Their individuality has been drowned in a sea of humanity. The most heart-rending loneliness is that of a friendless man in a crowd—so many fellow-beings, and not a spark of fellow-feeling!

II. HOW IT IS USED. The city-wilderness is used for the punishment of the Jews; but not for that only. 1. *God meets his people in the wilderness.* Success blinds us to the presence of God. Society makes us deaf to his voice. Adversity and solitude prepare us to remember him and to hearken to his Word. We need not flee to the wilderness of a John the Baptist—to the seclusion of a hermitage among the silent rocks—in order to meet with God. He will visit us in the crowded city. When the heart sinks, sad and faint at its own loneliness amid the din of a crowded life in which the lost wanderer has no share, God is ready to whisper words of comfort. He can find his poor suffering child in the crowd, and draw near to him there as well as in the field, the chamber, or the temple. God comes into most intimate relations with his people in their hour of desolation. He meets them "face to face." In the old wilderness of Sinai the Jews shrank from such near contact with God, so that it was reserved for Moses alone (Exod. xxxiii. 11). Now it is to be for all Israel. Thus deep distress has its privileges. 2. *God pleads with his people.* He desires to save; he urges repentance. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isa. i. 18). When men are most cold and repellant, perhaps our heart may be open to the sympathy of God. Then we can see that he seeks us in a great, undying love.

Note, it is a shame to Christendom that there should be a human wilderness among us. Heathen cities were cruel. But brotherhood is essential to Christianity. May we not say that, after pleading with us for our own sakes, God also pleads with us that we may save our lost brothers and sisters?

Ver. 40.—*God's holy mountain.* I. THE SITE. God's holy mountain is the site of the temple at Jerusalem. God promises his people that the exile will cease, that they shall return and worship him once more at the old sacred spot. Note the characteristics of it. 1. *It is exalted.* A mountain. Jerusalem is two thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean Sea. The rock where the altar of burnt offering stood—now covered by what is called the "Mosque of Omar"—is the highest part of Mount Moriah. We look up to heaven in worship. 2. *It is conspicuous.* A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Private worship should be unostentatious and secret (Matt. vi. 6); but public worship should be open to all, and well known, that others may be invited, and that God may be glorified. Churches should be built in conspicuous places. 3. *It is consecrated by old memories.* There the fathers worshipped, and there also God came down and blessed his people in the olden time. Faith is strengthened, and worship stimulated by such memories.

II. THE SERVICE. 1. *The people are to serve.* They will not be rescued only to be left to enjoy themselves in idleness. The restored exiles are redeemed for high service. Christians are not saved from ruin that they may slumber in listless indifference. Indeed, part of Christ's salvation is deliverance from idleness, and the redemption of our powers that they may be turned to higher uses, *i.e.* to the service of God. 2. *God is to be the one Lord served.* In the old days of sin the people had attempted a divided allegiance. But this must now cease. The redeemed must live to the Lord. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. vi. 24).

III. THE ACCEPTANCE. This is the heart of the whole promise, from which the glow and joy of it spring. God had rejected his people and their sacrifices, casting the men into exile and permitting the sacrifices to cease. Before that disaster, he had refused to accept the offerings of those who practised wickedness (Isa. i. 13). But now on their return to their old home as purged penitents, God will accept both the people and their gifts. All our labour is in vain unless it be accepted by him to whom it should be offered. God accepts his repentant and returning people (1) on the ground of their repentance; (2) in Christ, and on account of his merits; (3) fundamentally, because of his own forgiving love.

IV. THE SACRIFICES. The people, while they render service, do this especially by means of the offerings that they bring. 1. *They express gratitude.* Sacrifices for sin are excluded from this passage. Doubtless they will be required, for unhappily the people will sin again. But so sad a prospect is not to be contemplated as yet. The offerings now thought of are those of thanksgiving. They suggest the thought that God will give bountiful harvests. Here is a picture of joy in worship. 2. *They were required by God.* One would have thought that gratitude would have made the commandment superfluous. But Malachi shows that, as a matter of fact, the people were backward with their gifts (Mal. iii. 8). "Where are the nine?" (Luke xvii. 17). Christ is our one Sacrifice for sin. Yet God still requires us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices for thank-offerings and self-dedication (Rom. xii. 1).

Ver. 44.—"*For my Name's sake.*" The grounds of the Divine action are not man's deserts, but considerations in regard to God himself. This is the secret of our hope. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins" (Ps. ciii. 10). He hath dealt with us after his Name. God's Name stands for what is known of him—his revelation of himself; it also represents his fame, and then his honour—as we should say, his "good name." No doubt the latter is the meaning of God's Name in the present instance, although this rests upon the former meaning, and in a measure includes it. Our word "character" has this twofold meaning—what is known to be in a person and the reputation he bears—the subjective and the objective characters. We may say that God saves us for the sake of his own character in both senses.

I. HIS PUBLIC CHARACTER. 1. *God is honoured by his fidelity.* His name is pledged to his word. His promise involves his Name. When a man has put his name to a deed, he is bound to fulfil its conditions. If he fails, his name is dishonoured. Promoters make great efforts to secure for their enterprises names that will inspire confidence. God will keep his word for the sake of his credit—for this at least, though we know also for deeper reasons. 2. *God is honoured by his success.* The name of the artist goes with his work. If he sends out a bad piece of work, his name suffers. Now, Israel was God's rescued people. All the world gazed in wonder and admiration when the poor helpless slaves were wrested by Divine power from the iron grip of Pharaoh. They were seen to be a nation made by God, his workmanship. If they came to ruin after this, God would seem to have failed. Moses used this argument (Exod. xxxii. 12). 3. *God is honoured by his mercy.* Cruel earthly monarchs of the old heathen type were proud to record on their tablets the number of kings they had slain, and the number of cities they had sacked. We have learnt to see a greater royal dignity in the saying of William III. concerning a certain nonjuror, "The man has determined to be a martyr, but I have determined to prevent him." God is more honoured by saving the world than he would be by damning it.

II. HIS PERSONAL CHARACTER. 1. *God acts from regard to truth.* After all, it is but as an accommodation to human views that God can be said to keep his promises for the sake of his reputation, that his Name may not be dishonoured. He is essentially true and eternally constant. Though men may provoke him to change, he is firm and holds on to his purpose. Thus Christ persisted in his saving work, even when those whom he came to bless rejected him. He had a great purpose, and no action of man would turn him from it. 2. *God acts from regard to righteousness.* He desires to establish righteousness, and to extend its domain. For this purpose it will not be well that sin should be left to run its own fatal course unchecked, nor will it be best simply to visit the sin with vengeance, and to cut down the evil tree root and branch, sweeping the sinner with his sin into utter destruction. A silent desolation, in which every enemy lies low, smitten to death, is not the noblest victory. The conquest of the foe by his conversion to friendship is far higher. This is God's method. His righteousness is most honoured by the regeneration of sinners. 3. *God acts from regard to love.* His name is love. When we penetrate to the heart of God, love is what we see there. If, then, his Name expresses his inmost character, when God acts for his Name's sake he acts in love. Therefore, though he might smite, extirpate, and destroy them, he redeems, saves, and restores his unworthy children.

Ver. 49.—*The obscurity of revelation.* I. The teaching of Divine revelation is sometimes obscured. It was a fact that Ezekiel had been speaking in parables. No other prophet indulged so freely in symbolical language. His writings are a garden of luxuriant metaphors, which often blossom into elaborate allegories. This style is characteristic of Oriental literature, and it is a feature of the Bible teaching generally, though in Ezekiel it is carried out more fully than elsewhere. There is an analogy between the seen and the unseen. Unattentive hearers may be arrested by what strikes them on the plain of their own earthly living. It is not enough that we receive a bold abstract statement of truth into our understandings, for this may never fructify. An imaginative grasp of truth, even when it is less clearly defined, may be more vital and fruitful.

II. When teaching is obscure, the teacher is blamed. The unwilling hearers of Ezekiel laid the charge of failure to the account of the prophet. His language had been so enigmatical that they could not understand him. It is only reasonable that the Christian preacher should be open to criticism. On some accounts he should welcome it, for it shows that the minds of his hearers are not entirely asleep. Anything is better than blank indifference. Moreover, no one can be so certain that in many things the preacher fails sadly as he is himself, if he truly understands his high vocation. Nevertheless, the most hard criticism comes from unsympathetic hearers, who care only to be taught, and seek only to be amused, or who are too indolent to think, and therefore complain of any appeal to their intellects, and blame the preacher for making difficulties which must stand in the way of unthinking minds. The earnest inquirer after truth may pick up some crumbs from the most obscure and dull sermon.

III. The cause of the obscurity of revelation may be in the hearer. Like Moses, Ezekiel complains to God of the unjust judgment of Israel. His contemporaries were like the men of our Lord's generation, whom Christ compared to children in the market-place, unwilling to respond to any call from their companions (Matt. xi. 17). Ezekiel had tried plain speech; and his audience had turned deaf ears to his teaching. Then in a despairing effort to arrest attention, he had resorted to more novel and startling methods; but the only response he had received was an accusation of using enigmatical language. Neither method had proved successful. No method can succeed with unwilling hearers. The best seed fails when it falls by the wayside.

IV. The remedy for this obscurity may be found in some rousing experiences. What is wanted is not to scatter fresh seed, but to "break up your fallow ground" (Jer. iv. 3). Therefore the rejection of the truth recorded in ch. xx. is followed by the sword of judgment described in ch. xxi. After that, the people will hear, for then the soil will be prepared to receive the Word of God, whether it come in direct speech or in symbolical suggestions. Trouble breaks through the conventional crust of life, and leaves the bruised soul susceptible to spiritual influences. At least, this is the design of it. Unhappy indeed is the case of those who are hardened even against the last appeal.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 1—4.—*A rejected application.* It is evident that Ezekiel held a position of honour and of some kind of moral authority among his fellow-captives. Although he was not given to prophesying smooth things, his countrymen still resorted to him, evincing a certain confidence in his mission. On the occasion here described, an application made to the prophet was upon Divine authority rejected—with reason given. So unusual an incident leads to further consideration.

I. Man's need of a Divine oracle. The elders of Israel may be taken as representatives of mankind generally. They approached the prophet in order to *inquire* of the Lord. And in this they were right. 1. For human ignorance needs Divine enlightenment and teaching. 2. Human uncertainty and perplexity need Divine guidance, wise and authoritative. 3. Human sinfulness, clouding, as it does, the spiritual vision, needs authoritative precept as to the path of duty. 4. Human fear and foreboding need the consolation of Divine kindness and the promise of Divine support.

II. God's willingness to reply fully and graciously to the application of earnest inquirers. If there is one lesson more than another inculcated with frequency and constancy in the pages of Scripture, it is this—that the eternal Father is accessible to his children, that there is no need which they can bring unto him which he is not ready to supply from his infinite fulness and according to his infinite compassion. Revelation itself is a proof of this. The commission given to prophets and apostles was with a view to a suitable and sufficient response to the inquiries of men. The supreme Gift of God, his own Son, is just a provision intended to meet the wants, the deep spiritual cravings, of the human heart; he is "God with us." To question God's willingness to receive those who inquire of him is to cast a doubt upon the genuineness of the economies alike of the Law and of the gospel.

III. The moral conditions indispensably necessary in order to receiving a response from the oracle of God. Two such conditions may especially be mentioned. 1. *Teachableness* and *humility*; the disposition of the little child, without which none can enter the kingdom of heaven; the new birth, which is the entrance upon the new life. 2. *Repentance.* Whilst living in sin and loving sin men cannot receive the righteousness, the blessing, which the heavenly Father waits to bestow. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Sin is as a cloud which hides the sunlight from shining upon the soul; it is like certain conditions of atmosphere, it hinders the sound of God's voice from reaching the spiritual ear. This is the action, not of arbitrary will, but of moral law.

IV. The practical lessons to be learnt by applicants. 1. Here, many, in the same position as that occupied by the elders of Israel who came to Ezekiel, may learn the reason of their rejection. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by *you!*" 2. Here all suppliants may learn a lesson of encouragement. It is not in God's ill will that the obstacle to our reception is to be sought; for there is no ill will in him. "Wash you, make you clean!" Draw near with a sense of need, with confessions of unworthiness, with requests based upon the revealed loving-kindness of the heavenly Father; draw near in the name of him who has himself shown the vastness of the obstacle of sin, and who has himself removed that obstacle; and be assured of a gracious reception and a free and sufficient response. In Christ, the Eternal addresses the sons of men, saying, "Seek ye my face!" and in Christ the lowly and penitent may approach the throne of grace with the exclamation, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek!"—T.

Vers. 5—9.—*The memory of the great deliverance.* The continuity of the national life seems to have been as constantly present to the mind of Ezekiel as was the fact of individual responsibility. He distinguished between national and personal character; but both were in his apprehension real. It is certainly remarkable that, in answering as he was directed to do, the application of the elders, he should proceed to epitomize the history of the nation. His aim seems to have been to show that the irreligion and rebellion of which he complained in the epoch of the Captivity had existed throughout the several periods of Israelitish history. In a few brief paragraphs the prophet, in a most graphic way, exhibits the conduct of the chosen people in several successive eras. As was customary and natural, the first period dealt with was that of the momentous deliverance from the bondage of Egypt.

I. Revelation. God made himself known unto Israel in the land of Egypt. In this revelation were included: 1. *Choice.* 2. *Covenant,* confirmed by oath. 3. *Promise* of deliverance from bondage; *further promise* of a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands.

II. Command. One great duty Jehovah laid upon his chosen and covenant people—the duty of abandoning the idolatry, whose evil effects they had witnessed among the Egyptians. They could not consistently receive the Divine revelation, and at the same time be guilty of idolatry, which in all its forms was a contradiction of the worship and service of the one living and true God. Idolatry was not only dishonouring to Jehovah; it was a defilement of all who took part in its practices.

III. Rebellion. Notwithstanding the grace displayed in the revelation, notwithstanding the authority accompanying the command, the chosen and favoured nation rebelled. The circumstances of the case, when considered, render this all the more marvellous. Although the superior power of the God of their fathers had been so conspicuously displayed, "they did not forsake the idols of Egypt." Such conduct was both treason and rebellion in one.

IV. THREATENING. The truly human manner in which the prophet, in this and similar places, speaks of the Eternal leads some readers to charge him with anthropomorphism. The language used of a man might imply vindictiveness; and, taken in connection with what follows, might even imply mutability and fickleness. The Divine "fury" and "anger" may not be free from emotion, but such language is mainly intended to convey the impression that the law of righteousness exists, and that it cannot be violated and defied with impunity, either by nations or by individuals.

V. RELENTING AND SALVATION. The ground upon which Jehovah bore with his sinful people is remarkable; it was "for his own Name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen." For this reason he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt. Their emancipation was owing, not to any daring of their own, not to any heroism of their leaders, not to any fortunate conjunction of circumstances, but to the interposition of Almighty power.—T.

Vers. 10—17.—*The memory of the wilderness of Sinai.* The circumstances employed by the Most High to make Israel a nation were of the most marvellous and romantic kinds. Psalmists and prophets, nay, even Christian apostles and deacons, looking back upon the events of early Israelitish history, felt the fascination of the ancient story, of the emancipation from Egypt, and of the lengthened discipline of the wilderness, by which the tribes were welded into a nation and fitted for the possession of the land of promise.

I. THE GIFT OF THE LAW. Men, especially in their corporate capacity, need something more than exhortation, dissuasion, sentiment. They need *law*. And this necessity was met, when Israel was led into the wilderness, by the giving of the Law at Sinai. In this gift must be included the ten commandments, the precepts for family and personal life, the institution of the ceremonial, sacerdotal, and sacrificial dispensation, the confirmation and sanctification of the sabbath, by their observance of which the Jews were so well known by their neighbours. This last-named institution was, however, regarded by the God of Israel in a higher light—as "a sign between himself and them." The people were by these means placed under authority. Sanctions were attached to the Law, and life was assured to the obedient.

II. THE REBELLION OF THE SUBJECTS. 1. The season and scene of this rebellion should be noticed; it took place, as the prophet reminds the elders, and as the record itself informs us, in the wilderness, *i.e.* immediately after the great deliverance and the promulgation of the Law, and whilst the people were still dependent in an especial manner upon the bounty and the protection of the Most High. 2. The offensive form of this rebellion is noted: "They walked not according to my statutes, and despised my judgments"—a course which showed their failure to appreciate the privileges bestowed upon them, and the dishonour which they dared to offer to their Deliverer and King. 3. Their inexcusable neglect of the provision made in the weekly sabbath for their true well-being. 4. Their treachery. "Their heart went after idols."

III. THE JUDGMENT AND THE MERCY OF THE KING AND LAWGIVER. 1. The immediate punishment inflicted upon the rebellious generation was the refusal to permit them to enter upon the land of promise. 2. The forbearance and mercy of God were displayed in that he did not make an end in the wilderness of those who had rebelled against him and defied him.—T.

Vers. 18—26.—*The memory of the wilderness of the wanderings.* At this point the transition is made from the generation who received the Law at Sinai to the generation which followed, and to whom another probation was afforded.

I. THE DIVINE LAW WAS REPUBLISHED.

II. THE REBELLION AND IDOLATRY OF THE PEOPLE WERE RENEWED.

III. THE MOST FLAGRANT FORMS OF IDOLATROUS PRACTICE WERE ADDED TO WHAT HAD PRECEDED. In ver. 26 mention is made of the causing the firstborn to pass through the fire in the service of Moloch.

IV. ADDITIONAL AND SEVERER THREATS WERE UTTERED. In ver. 23 threats of scattering and dispersion among the heathen were added to the more general denunciations.

V. STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS WERE TURNED TO THE CONDEMNATION OF THE REBELLIOUS.

VI. SPARING MERCY WAS AGAIN EXERCISED TO PRESERVE THE NATION FROM DESTRUCTION.

APPLICATION. The lesson is very impressively taught in this passage that repentance and amendment by no means follow as a matter of course upon either punishment or forbearance. The discipline through which Israel passed partook of both characters; yet it left the people, as a people, still disposed to rebellion against God, and to contempt of his Law. It is the *spirit* in which God's dealings with us are received which determines whether or not they shall issue in our highest good.—T.

Vers. 27—31.—*The memory of offences in the land of promise.* Notwithstanding the variety of incident and circumstance in the history of the chosen people, there was much sameness in their experience, in their discipline, in their errors and faults. This may account for the brevity with which the later epochs of national history are treated by the prophet in this passage. Yet there is a consciousness on his part of the aggravation of Israel's guilt which is apparent in the tone of this portion of this remarkable chapter.

I. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND IDOLATRY WERE AGGRAVATED BY THE FACT THAT THEY WERE PERSISTED IN NOTWITHSTANDING PAST ADMONITION AND CORRECTION.

II. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND IDOLATRY WERE AGGRAVATED WHEN THEY OCCURRED IN THE LAND OF PROMISE.

III. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND IDOLATRY WERE AGGRAVATED BY THEIR COEXISTENCE WITH THE SANCTUARY OF JEHOVAH.

IV. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND IDOLATRY WERE AGGRAVATED BY THEIR JUXTAPOSITION WITH THE PURE SERVICES AND FESTIVALS OF THE TRUE RELIGION.

V. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND IDOLATRY WERE AGGRAVATED BY THE FACT THAT THE CHOSEN PEOPLE ADOPTED THE RELIGION AND THE PRACTICES OF MORALLY INFERIOR RACES.

VI. ISRAEL'S AGGRAVATED REBELLION AND IDOLATRY PREVENTED THEIR REPRESENTATIVES FROM ENJOYING THE FAVOUR AND RECEIVING THE RESPONSE OF THE LORD.—T.

Vers. 32—38.—*The purpose of Israel's election.* The prophecy at this point turns from the story of the past to the prediction and prospect of the future.

I. GOD'S PURPOSES CANNOT BE FULFILLED BY THE ABSORPTION OF ISRAEL AMONG THE HEATHEN. Exile and dispersion were appointed as chastisement and discipline. And there were those among the Hebrews who thought that, as a nation, they might amalgamate with the heathen, and might "serve wood and stone." To human apprehension, this might seem the natural consequence of their experience. But the reverse was what happened—captivity and exile served to restore the chosen people to their fidelity to Jehovah.

II. GOD'S RULE OVER HIS PEOPLE WILL BE MANIFESTLY AND EFFECTIVELY MAINTAINED EVEN IN DISTANT AND HEATHEN LANDS. Lest it should be imagined that, when the children of Israel are scattered among the nations, the God of Israel will cease to exercise over them his vigilant sway and righteous retribution, the strongest language is used to express the unceasing control which, wherever his people are found, will be maintained over them. "With a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm will I rule over you. . . . I will be King over you."

III. GOD WILL PLEAD WITH THE SCATTERED ISRAELITES WITH A VIEW TO SECURE THEIR SUBMISSION AND ALLEGIANCE. The expression implies personal interest and personal intercourse. It implies the free agency of the human beings with whom the Lord deigns to plead. It implies earnest desire for the welfare of individual Israelites—welfare which can only be secured through the conviction, the faith, the voluntary subjection, the loyalty, of these who have been in rebellion.

IV. GOD WILL PURGE OUT REBELS AND TRANSGRESSORS, AND SO PURIFY THE TRUE ISRAEL FROM THOSE WHO ARE ISRAELITES IN NAME ONLY AND NOT IN SPIRIT AND

REALITY. Forbearance may and will be exercised, but discrimination must take place. The dross must be consumed in order that the pure, fine gold may be brought out.

V. GOD WILL GATHER THE TRUE SHEEP INTO THE FOLD, AND RE-ESTABLISH HIS COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE. This is the real aim of the Divine government. Other steps are the means; this is the end. Sooner or later this glorious and blessed result shall be brought to pass. "There shall be one flock, and one Shepherd." The bond of the covenant shall be again cemented. The purposes of Divine compassion shall be completely fulfilled. The scattered wanderers shall be led home, for he that scattered shall gather them. He shall make a way whereby his banished ones shall return. In the land of promise, the better country, the true citizens shall assemble, and shall offer sacrifices of perpetual obedience, and songs of endless praise, to their Deliverer and their Lord.—T.

Vers. 40—44.—*The glorious restoration.* It is difficult to believe that this language can refer to a local and temporal restoration and union. In this, as in other passages of his prophecy, Ezekiel seems to point on to the new, the Christian dispensation, into whose spiritual glory he seems to gain some glimpses neither dim nor uncertain.

I. THE SCENE OF THE RESTORATION. God's holy mountain, the mountain of the height of Israel, is the symbol of the Church of the Son of God.

II. THE PARTICIPATORS IN THE RESTORATION. Those concerning whom the promise is spoken are those who have been scattered abroad, but are now brought home, and who constitute "the house of Israel," *i.e.* the true Israel, the Israel of God.

III. THE SERVICES OF THE RESTORATION. By the services, the offerings, the firstfruits, the oblations, must be understood the spiritual sacrifices, especially of obedience and of praise, which the accepted of God delight to lay upon his altar.

IV. THE MEMORIES OF THE RESTORATION. These are of two kinds. The restored have to recollect, and to recollect with loathing, their wanderings, their evil doings, their defilements. But they have also to remember the work which God has wrought for them, the way by which God has led them, and the mercy and loving-kindness which God has shown to them.—T.

Vers. 1—32.—*Unacceptable prayer.* The exact date is given as a voucher for truthfulness. The prophet committed to writing at once what had occurred. The people are yet divided by distance—part dwell in Judæa and part in Chaldea. In a spirit of vain curiosity the elders of the exiled part approach the prophet to inquire after the destined fortunes and fate of their nation. Had they sought for guidance or help to amend their lives, their prayer had been successful. God does not pander to a spirit of curiosity.

I. DISTRESS USUALLY DRIVES MEN TO SEEK GOD. The bulk of men are self-confident. They will not seek God until they discover their insufficiency to meet misfortune or death. As the sailor does not seek harbour until driven by tempest, so men avoid God. Yet, in the hour of peril or pain, an inborn instinct leads them to rest on an arm mightier than theirs. Sorrow is God's home-call.

II. PRAYER LEADS TO THE RESURRECTION OF OUR SINS. It is impossible to do good to a man so long as he stifles the voice of conscience; and the first duty of a true prophet is to bring sin to our remembrance. Unrepented sin is man's chief foe, and to dislodge this foe from the heart's citadel is God's prime endeavour. The barrier that shuts out the light of heaven is the shutter of our own impenitence. The obdurate man destroys his own hope. He bars heaven's door against himself; he writes his own failure. It is kindness on God's part to show us our sins, for his hope is that we may loathe them and abandon them.

III. THE HISTORY OF OUR FATHERS' SINS OFTEN BECOMES THE HISTORY OF OUR OWN SINS. He who hears of his father's sin and does not hate it soon adopts it as his own child. The history of the past is compressed into our own experience. The Fall in Eden is repeated in our own history. All the history and development of a tree is condensed into each fruit-kernel; so the moral history is incorporated in us. We may use it for our profit or for our injury. If we continue the same line of conduct as our guilty forefathers, we re-enact their sins, we endorse their guilty deeds. The entail ment of moral qualities is a pregnant truth. On this ground it was that all the martyrs' blood, from Abel downward, accumulated upon the men in our Lord's age.

IV. NEGLECT OF DIVINE ADMONITION IS FRESH SIN. The knowledge of past admonition adds to our responsibility. Warnings addressed to our ancestors are warnings addressed to us. Every item in the revelation of God's will is intended for our profit; for revelations of the eternal God have an abiding force. If we are not moved or awed by judgments passed upon our ancestors, ours is the greater sin. As our light is greater than was our forefathers', so is our sin, unless we repudiate it by repentance.

V. GOD'S PERMISSIONS ARE OFTEN CHASTISEMENTS. "Wherefore I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live." The self-blindness and obduracy of men is such that oftentimes God cannot give them the best laws: such would be above their comprehension—above their appreciation. Good law can never be much in advance of a people's moral condition. God allowed Lot to retire to Zoar, but the permission became a curse. God yielded to the Jews' demand for a king, but their kings led them to civic strife and idolatry. Jesus Christ yielded to the demand of the Gadarenes to leave their province, but their loss was great. How much need have we to merge our wills in God's will!

VI. GOD'S MEMORY OF OUR MISDEEDS NEVER FAILS. We may forget, or regard as trivial, some deed of the past; yet it lives, in complete reality, in the memory of God. Likely enough these elders were astounded with this long recital of their evil deeds. This, however, is a sample of God's treatment of all men. The reappearance of our old sins—the reappearance before the public gaze—will be one element in our punishment. The future publicity of our follies will form a great ingredient in our shame. The world already knows the aggravated sins of the Hebrews.

VII. GOD'S WILL OVERREACHES AND OVERMASTERS MAN'S WILL. "And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen!" Man resolves; God overrules. Mighty as man's will is, it is feeble in comparison with God's will. It may be as iron, but even iron is treated as a plaything by the electric force. Even wickedness shall be restrained of God. Satan shall be bound with chains. Many men are guiltier than the measure of their deeds. There are murderers that never slew a man, felons that never stole. The intention is as guilty as the act. Man's intended wickedness shall be held in check.

VIII. GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS NAME IS COINCIDENT WITH MAN'S BEST WELFARE. "I wrought for my Name's sake." One great purpose our God has in view, in all his government among men, is to reveal himself—to unfold the qualities of his character. This is essential to the highest good of his creature man. He will be patient and tender, or judicial and severe, in order to bring into view all the excellences of his majestic character. The more his saints see of his personal characteristics, the more they admire him, the more they become like him. No one will conclude that the human family has yet seen all the aspects of God's character or all the perfections of his nature. Without doubt, eternity will be spent in spelling out the meaning of that great Name.—D.

Vers. 33—44.—*Judicial discrimination.* As among men, when matters of serious importance have to be determined, there is the employment of a religious oath, in other words, a solemn appeal that God should witness the truthfulness of the parties; so, when God discloses his intentions respecting the destiny of men, he speaks with a view to produce the deepest impression. He stakes his own existence upon the certainty of the event.

I. GOD'S RULE IS DIRECTED SOLELY FOR MAN'S PURITY. Such is his own holiness of nature, that he cannot tolerate impurity of any kind in his kingdom. Or, if he does tolerate it for a season, it is only for the purpose of more effectually purifying his saints. To distribute his own happiness, he created men; but *that* happiness can only reach perfection when it is rooted in purity. Purity or perdition is the only alternative under the sceptre of Jehovah.

II. THE PLACE APPOINTED FOR THE TEST. "I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I plead with you face to face." Already this had been done in the wilderness of Sinai, and now it shall be done again. This wilderness is not Babylon, nor the desert between Babylon and Judæa. It denotes the isolated condition of the people, when they should be scattered among all the nations. A desert is the outward emblem of man's desolation through sin. Iniquity has made a desert in his heart, in his home, in the nation—a desert in all his surroundings. *There*, under a sense of his folly and misfortune, God condescends to plead with men.

III. A WINNOWING PROCESS IS TO BE PURSUED. "I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me." If the nation, following its lower passions and following foolish kings, refuse God's salvation, God will deal with them individually. As a nation they shall be destroyed; but an election shall be saved. God will appear as a Thresher, and will purge his floor, and separate the chaff from the wheat. Would that the entire nation had yielded to his righteous rule! Yet, if the majority reject his grace, a minority will accept it. Not a single penitent shall be swept away with the rebellious. Divine wisdom can and will discriminate.

IV. THE OBDURATE SHALL BE ABANDONED. "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me." Lightly as men may esteem the severity of such a sentence, it is the most crushing doom that can befall them—to be given over to the indulgence of their vices. For God to withdraw the restraints of his grace, and allow them the liberty they crave, would be the heaviest scourge, the beginning of perdition. Said God of Ephraim, "He is joined to his idols: let him alone!" Of some it is declared by Jesus the Christ, "He is guilty of eternal sin."

V. THE PENITENT SHALL RISE TO EMINENT PIETY. (See vers. 40 and 41.) They shall worship again in the consecrated mount. Their offerings shall be spontaneous and abundant. Their gifts and sacrifices shall send a sweet savour Godward. Best of all, they shall find acceptance with God. The Most High will be honoured in their midst. His presence will be felt as a purifying power. "I will be sanctified in you." The remembrance of their past ways and past experiences shall open their eyes to the foulness and loathsomeness of sin. Their inmost tastes and affections shall be refined. Self-condemnation is an essential element in repentance.

VI. THE RESULT WILL BE LARGER ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord." The manifestation of God's patience, condescension, and tender love will enlarge their conception of God. He will gain a larger place in their esteem and confidence. His true glory will come forth. In this way even human sin will contribute to human elevation; man's guilt will promote God's glory. In the widest sense, "all things shall work together for good." The darkest disaster will serve as a setting for the jewels of God's goodness.—D.

Vers. 45—49.—*The forest in flame.* In a nation, men's minds are in every stage of development; a hundred phases of feeling prevail. Hence God, in his kindness, sent his instructions in every possible form, and adapted his reproofs to every state of mind—to children as well as to men of riper years.

I. THE PARABLE IMPLIES A RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN MEN AND FOREST TREES. Amid many differences, there are some resemblances, and it is on one of these resemblances that this admonition fastens. In the earlier stages of their life, trees grow better in clusters. They serve as a support to each other, and also as a protection against storms. But soon the roots rob nourishment, each from the other. The boughs shut out the light and air. They prevent the growth and hardening of the wood. They become mutually injurious. Sap diminishes. The branches dry and decay. So it is with men in society. Casting off the fear of God, they corrupt each other. They become one another's tempters. Healthy growth ceases. Shutting out, each from the other, the light and sunshine from heaven, their proper life shrivels, dries up, and decays. They become combustible—fit for burning.

II. RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN GOD'S RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND MATERIAL FIRE. On these two resemblances the parable depends. As fire naturally lays hold of and destroys forest trees, so does God's anger naturally lay hold of and destroy wicked men. There is a fixed and unalterable correspondence. "Be sure your sin will find you out!" You may as well swallow poison, and hope to live; you may as well set fire to gunpowder, and expect it not to explode; you may as well touch a galvanic current, and think to avoid any nervous sensation,—as to sin, and not suffer penalty. Each is alike an eternal decree of the living God. As each plant has in it the potency to produce another plant, so every sin has in it the germ of destruction.

III. PROXIMITY TO EVIL MEN CONSTITUTES A DANGER. All the trees in a forest are not equally dessicated. Yet such becomes the fierceness of the flame, fed by the drier trees, that those less dessicated are reduced to ashes. Men *may* be less guilty than their neighbours; they may flatter themselves that they are not so corrupt as others; nevertheless, if they do not separate themselves, or labour to improve their neighbours, they may be consumed in the general conflagration. The green trees were threatened with destruction along with the dry. Evil company is perilous. Each one has sin enough to draw down Divine anger.

IV. MENTAL BLINDNESS IS A DISASTROUS EFFECT OF SIN. "Doth he not speak in parables?" The bulk of men say, "It is a pretty story. It has much literary beauty. The preacher was eloquent, imaginative, interesting." Yet they see not the moral significance, do not feel the points of application. The sermon well suited some absent person; it did not touch them. The eyes of conscience are put out. As it was in the day when Jesus spake his parables, so is it always. "Men see, but do not perceive; they hear, but do not understand." To-day a thousand self-blinded men say, "The doom of the wicked is not so terrible as it seems; for the alarming language of Jesus Christ was *only* a parable." Yet a parable contains hidden truth, sometimes the most arousing.—D.

Vers. 1—4.—*On inquiring of the Lord.* "And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord," etc. We here enter upon a new division of this book, which extends to the close of ch. xxiii. The prophecies of this section were occasioned by a visit of the elders of Israel to the prophet, to inquire of the Lord through him. The paragraph now before us, which may be compared with ch. xiv. 1—5, suggests—

I. THAT IT IS RIGHT AND LAUDABLE TO INQUIRE OF THE LORD. These elders of Israel who came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before the prophet, were of the exiles. Like Ezekiel, they had been carried away from their own land to Babylon. Neither the occasion which gave rise to their inquiry, nor the inquiry itself, is stated. Hengstenberg conjectures that "the embassy had probably a special occasion in the circumstances of the time, in a favourable turn which the affairs of the coalition had taken. They wish to obtain confirmation of their joyful hopes from the mouth of the prophet." Or they wanted to ascertain from him if there was a prospect of the deliverance of Zedekiah from the Chaldean power (cf. Jer. xxi. 1, 2). It seems clear from the answer which they received that their inquiry was political, not moral; that it related to the state of their country in relation to other nations, not to their personal relations to God. But our present point is that it is right and commendable to inquire of the Lord. We may inquire of him by searching the Scriptures in an earnest and devout spirit, by prayer for the illumination and direction of the Holy Spirit, and by engaging in public worship and attending the ministration of his Word. Thus David desired "to inquire in his temple." This is often profitable to those who wait upon him in a true spirit. Asaph found it so (Ps. lxxiii. 16, 17). And so did Hezekiah King of Judah (2 Kings xix. 14—37). And so have millions besides.

II. THAT MEN SOMETIMES INQUIRE OF THE LORD IN A WRONG SPIRIT. These elders did so (cf. ch. xiv. 1—3). Their outward act was right; their inward motive was wrong. Moreover, while it was right to inquire of the Lord, that which they wanted to know was not commendable. They wanted the satisfaction of their political curiosity, not direction in the way of duty. So far were they from desiring to conform to the will of God, that they were in their heart proposing to themselves an opposite course of conduct (cf. ver. 32). "They did here," says Greenhill, "like many that are bent upon marriage, who will go to two or three to inquire and have counsel, but are resolved to go on whatever is said unto them; so whatever counsel they should have had given them from the Lord, they meant to go on in their wicked ways; and this was profound hypocrisy, whose wont it is to veil the foulest things with the fairest pretences." And in these days men may inquire of the Lord perversely. They may consult him by means of his Word in a wrong spirit. They may examine that Word with strong prejudices; or not to learn his mind and will, but to obtain sanctions and supports for their own opinions; or from curiosity rather than piety. Men may attend church, not "to inquire in his temple," but from very different and very inferior motives. They may even seek him in prayer in a wrong spirit—in an unbelieving, unsubmissive, selfish, worldly spirit. If we would draw near to him acceptably and profitably, we "must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that seek after him;" we must be humble and reverent; we must bow loyally to his supreme authority, and we must sincerely desire to do his will. "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching," etc. (John vii. 17). By earnestly desiring and endeavouring to do the will of God, as far as it is known unto you, you are qualifying yourself to receive further revelations from him.

III. THAT THE LORD OBSERVES THE SPIRIT IN WHICH MEN INQUIRE OF HIM. He knew the real feelings and motives of these elders of Israel, and spake to them accordingly through his servant Ezekiel. And he was fully cognizant of the idols in the hearts of the elders who waited upon the prophet on a former occasion (ch. xiv. 3). The most plausible words and the most specious forms cannot impose upon him. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart;" "The Lord searcheth all hearts;" "I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart;" "The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins;" "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off," etc. (Ps. cxxxix. 1—5). "He knows," says Greenhill, "upon what grounds, with what purpose, intentions, resolutions, men come to hear his Word, to ask counsel of his servants. Look to yourselves, spirits, and all your ways; God seeth and knoweth all, and if you be not sincere, without guile and hypocrisy, he will find you out and detect you" (cf. John iv. 23, 24).

IV. THAT THE LORD WILL NOT ANSWER THE INQUIRIES OF THOSE WHO APPROACH HIM IN A WRONG SPIRIT. "Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye come to inquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you." Bishop Lowth states the truth clearly and forcibly: "You shall not receive such an answer as you expect, but such as your hypocrisy deserves." The Lord would not reply to their questionings. They were not in a condition to receive enlightening or edifying communications from God. Deeply insincere as they were, they could not receive revelations of Divine truth. The only message suited to them was a rebuke or warning because of their sin, or a summons to repentance. This principle is universally and abidingly true. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;" "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you," etc. (Isa. i. 15); "Then shall they unto the Lord, but he will not answer them," etc. (Micah iii. 4); "We know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him heareth."

V. THOUGH THE LORD WILL NOT ANSWER THE INQUIRIES OF THOSE WHO APPROACH HIM IN A WRONG SPIRIT, YET HE WILL ADDRESS TO THEM WORDS SUITED TO THEIR MORAL CONDITION. He did so on a former occasion (ch. xiv.). He does so here. 1. *Here is their personal condemnation.* "Wilt thou judge them, son of man, wilt thou judge them?" The prophet is thus summoned to "pronounce sentence upon them. The repetition of the phrase is expressive of a strong desire that the act should be begun, and thus gives the force of an imperative." God would not reply to them for the gratification of their curiosity, but he speaks to them for the salvation of their souls. This condemnation might awaken them to reflection and repentance. 2. *Here is the exhibition of their national sins.* "Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers." By the declaration of these the Lord would vindicate the righteousness of his dealings with them as a people. He would also show them "that the evil is deep-seated, and a radical cure is to be desired, which can only be effected by a judgment of inflexible rigour" (Hengstenberg).

CONCLUSION. Our subject forcibly impresses the necessity of true-heartedness as a condition of approaching God, so as to meet with his acceptance and to obtain his blessing.—W. J.

Vers. 5—9.—*God, and Israel in Egypt.* "And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when I chose Israel," etc. This paragraph sets forth the dealings of God with his people in the land of Egypt.

I. THE CHOICE OF THE PEOPLE BY GOD. "Thus saith the Lord; In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the Lord your God." The day when God chose Israel and made himself known unto them as their God was the time when he interposed on their behalf by his servant Moses. He chose them; they did not choose him. They did not seek to serve or worship him; but he sent Moses to demand their emancipation in order that they might worship and serve him. And he thus chose them neither for their greatness nor their goodness, but because of his own love for them and his fidelity to his promises made unto their fathers (cf. Deut. vii. 7, 8). He chose them to receive special revelations of religious and redemptive truth, to be "a people for his own possession," his visible Church in the world, and his witnesses amongst men, testifying to his unity and supremacy, and observing and maintaining his worship (cf. Deut. x. 15; xiv. 2). And still God of his grace calls men to himself. He begins with us, and not we with him. "God commendeth his own love toward us," etc. (Rom. v. 8); "Herein is love, not that we loved God," etc. (1 John iv. 10). If we have sought God, it was because he first sought us. "By the grace of God I am what I am." And the Lord made himself known to them as their God, both by declarations and by mighty deeds wrought on their behalf (Exod. iii. 14; vi. 1—8). He chose them to be his people; he gave himself to them to be their God. "I am the Lord your God." "'Your God.' This is a great word, and hath great mercy in it; an engaging word, tying God and all his attributes to them: your God to counsel you, your God to protect you, your God to deliver you, your God to comfort you, your God to plead for you, your God to teach you, your God to set up my Name and worship among you, your God to bless you with the dews of heaven and fulness of the earth, your God to hear your prayers and make you happy" (Greenhill). And he asserts this relationship in the most solemn manner. "I lifted up mine hand unto them," *i.e.* I sware unto them.

II. The gracious purpose of God in relation to his people. (Ver. 6.) This purpose has two branches. 1. *To deliver them from a miserable condition.* "In that day I lifted up mine hand unto them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt." He broke the power of their cruel oppressors, and by a mighty hand he set them free from their burdens, and led them out of the land of their captivity. And when men believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and respond to his call, he delivers them from the bondage of sin. He came into our world to "proclaim liberty to the captives," to save men from the power and pollution and punishment of sin. 2. *To establish them in a desirable condition.* "Into a land that I had espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands." (1) This land was selected for them by God. He summoned Abram to go forth unto the land that he would show him (Gen. xii. 1; and cf. Exod. iii. 8, 17). "He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob whom he loved." (2) This land was excellently situated and richly fertile. (We have noticed these points in treating of ch. xix. 10.) In its natural fortifications, its remarkable fertility, and its religious privileges, it was glorious as compared with other lands. And this land God gave unto them. And our Saviour Jesus Christ not only delivers from sin those who believe on him, but he introduces them into a condition of spiritual privilege and progress. "Ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear," etc. (Rom. viii. 15—17); "Beloved, now are we children of God," etc. (1 John iii. 2).

III. The obligations of the people to God. "And I said unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." This obligation arises out of the relationship stated in ver. 5. Because they are his people and he is their God, they must be true to him as their God, having no connection with idols. The great basis of their obligation to him is contained in the words, "I am Jehovah your God" (cf. Exod. xx. 1, 2). In this prohibition of idolatry there are two points which call for brief notice. 1. Sin entering by the eyes. "The abominations of his eyes"—an expression which denotes idols. The eyes look upon the idols, become familiar with them, and come to behold them with respect and reverence. The eyes are both inlets and outlets to the heart. They convey to the heart the impression of the idol, and if the heart come to reverence the idol, they express that reverence in their gaze. The eyes are often an avenue through which temptation to sin enters the soul. 2. Sin defiling the heart. "Defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt." Sin pollutes our moral life at its very prings. It proceeds from an impure heart, and it makes the heart still more impure. David was conscious of its defilement when he prayed, "Wash me throughly from mine iniquity," etc. (Ps. li. 2, 7, 10). The people of God are under the most binding obligations to shun everything that would lead to their moral contamination, and to be true to him both in heart and in life.

IV. THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE AGAINST GOD. (Ver. 8.) 1. *The nature of this rebellion.* "But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me; they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt." They rebelled against Jehovah by persisting in their idolatrous practices. The Mosaic history does not explicitly mention the idolatry of the Israelites in Egypt; but it points to it by implication. The making and worship of the golden calf was probably an imitation of the Egyptian worship of the various sacred cows or of the sacred bulls. It appears from Lev. xvii. 7 (Revised Version), that in the desert the Israelites offered sacrifices to he-goats, and "the worship of a deity under the form of a he-goat was peculiar to Egypt" (Hengstenberg). That they worshipped idols in Egypt is evident also from Josh. xxiv. 14, "Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the river, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord." And from ch. xxiii. 3 of our prophet, "They committed whoredoms in Egypt." This idolatry they did not abandon when summoned so to do. 2. *The punishment of this rebellion.* "Then I said I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt." Greenhill explains this clause, "He thought in his heart to destroy them in the midst of Egypt." Scott, "He justly might, and certainly would, have destroyed them with the Egyptians, if he had dealt with them according to their deserts." Schröder suggests that the increased oppression, and the persecution of the Israelites by the Egyptians (Exod. v. 5—23), were signs of the anger of the Lord against them. The Egyptians acted wickedly and cruelly in thus ill treating them; for they had not wronged them. Yet they might have been the unconscious agents of punishing the Israelites for their unfaithfulness to the Lord their God. This is certain, that persistent sin invariably meets with deserved punishment.

V. THE FULFILMENT OF THE PURPOSE OF GOD NOTWITHSTANDING THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE. "But I wrought for my Name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt" (cf. Numb. xiv. 13—16). Had he not accomplished his purpose in delivering them out of Egypt, his Name or honour might have been contemned by the Egyptians and others. They might have questioned or even denied: 1. His ability to execute his purposes and fulfil his promises, asserting that he did not do so because he could not (cf. Numb. xiv. 15, 16). 2. His fidelity to his purposes and promises, asserting that he does not abide by his determinations, but is changeable and therefore unreliable. 3. His kindness towards his people, asserting that he is not so deeply interested in them as to always fulfil his engagements with them. Therefore, for his Name's sake, he brought Israel in triumph out of Egypt. The sins of man cannot frustrate the purposes of God. By his sins man may exclude himself from any participation in their fulfilment, or any enjoyment thereof; but he cannot defeat their fulfilment (cf. Exod. xxxii. 9, 10; Numb. xiv. 11, 12; xxiii. 19; 2 Tim. ii. 13).

CONCLUSION. Our subject presents: 1. *Warnings against rebellion against God.* 2. *Encouragements to trust and obey him.*—W. J.

Vers. 10—26.—*God, and Israel in the wilderness.* "Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt," etc. The chief teachings of this section of the chapter may be developed under the following heads.

I. THE KINDNESS OF GOD IN HIS DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE. This is brought into our notice in four respects. 1. *In the deeds which he wrought for them.* "I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness." Their emancipation from their oppressors was effected by the mighty hand of God, and of his unmerited grace to them. Our Lord Jesus is the great Deliverer from the serfdom of sin and Satan (cf. Isa. lxi. 1; John viii. 36). 2. *In the gifts which he bestowed upon them.* (1) His Law. "And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in them." Statutes and judgments express the general idea of law. This God gave to them at Sinai, soon after their deliverance from Egypt. And this Law was given for life unto them (cf. Exod. xx. 12; Matt. xix. 17; Rom. vii. 10, 12). "The precepts which God gave his people," says Hengstenberg, "bring life and salvation with them to him who does them. What grace in God, who gives such precepts! what a summons to true obedience! These precepts also imply before all things that they shall confess their sins and seek forgiveness in the blood of atonement. This is required by the laws concerning the sin offerings, which in the Mosaic Law form the root of all other offerings; the Passover, which so strictly requires us to strive after the forgiveness of sins, and connects all salvation with it and the great Day of Atonement." (2) His sabbaths. "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." The sabbath was instituted by God, and was peculiar to Israel. It was a mutual sign between him and them. By establishing it amongst them the Lord sanctified them, separated them from the nations as a people chosen for himself; and by keeping it they manifested their allegiance to him and honoured him. By its institution he owned them as his people; by its observance they owned him as their God. By so doing they also promoted their best interests. How rich and manifold are God's gifts to us! Laws, ordinances, sabbaths, sanctuaries, religious ministries, his sacred Word, his beloved Son, his Holy Spirit! 3. *In the forbearance which he exercised towards them.* "Then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my Name's sake," etc. (vers. 13, 14, 17). Many and extreme were the provocations of the Israelites in the wilderness. "How oft did they rebel against him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!" More than once it seemed as though he would have destroyed them utterly, as they certainly deserved. Yet in wrath he remembered mercy. "He being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not," etc. (Ps. lxxviii. 38, 39). How frequently and grievously have we sinned against him! We too have tried his patience, have provoked him by our unfaithfulness, our rebelliousness, our perversity. Great has been his long-suffering toward us (cf. Ps. ciii. 8—11; 2 Pet. iii. 9). 4. *In the appeals which he addressed to them.* God did not stand by (as it were), patiently bearing with them in their sin, yet making no effort to save them therefrom; but he appealed to them earnestly and repeatedly to keep his commands. "I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers," etc. (vers. 18—20). The reference in these verses is to the regiving of the Law in the plains of Moab, as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. That book is one great appeal, in many tones and by many arguments, to the younger generation to be true to the Lord their God. How graciously and powerfully God appeals to us in this Christian age! to our sense of duty and our sense of interest; by authoritative command and gracious persuasion; by strong fears and thrilling hopes; by his Divine Son and by his Holy Spirit.

II. THE PERSISTENT WICKEDNESS OF THE PEOPLE IN THEIR RELATION TO GOD. Three features of their wickedness are here exhibited. 1. *Apostasy of heart.* "Their heart went after their idols" (ver. 16); "Their heart was not right with him, neither were they faithful in his covenant" (Ps. lxxviii. 37). Their sin was not merely on the surface of their lives, but deeply rooted in their moral nature. "Out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders," etc. (Matt. xv. 19); "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." 2. *Rebellion of life.* "The house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness," etc. (ver. 13); "They despised my judgments," etc. (ver. 16). It is quite unnecessary to specify their rebellions, because they were so numerous. And the profanations of the sabbath must not be restricted to the attempt to gather manna on that day (Exod. xvi. 27—30), or to the case of the man who gathered sticks thereon (Numb. xv. 32—36). God required them to sanctify the sabbath (Deut. v. 12); to "hallow" it (ver. 20); "to consecrate it in every respect to him, and withdraw it wholly from the region of self-interest, of personal sinful inclination;" and as they failed to keep it thus, they profaned it. Failing to sanctify it by reverent worship and hearty service, they are charged with desecrating it. And it behoves us earnestly to endeavour to preserve the Lord's day for the promotion of the best interests of man and the supreme honour of God. Its secularization would be an irreparable loss and injury to man. 3. *Successiveness in sin.* "The children rebelled against me," etc. (ver. 21). The younger generation were far from being so wicked as their fathers (Josh. xxiv. 31); they were also far from being true and faithful in their relation to the Lord their God. Scott says truly "that the generation that entered Canaan was the best which there ever was of that favoured nation." Yet they frequently rebelled against the Lord. What a lamentable successiveness in sin there has been in the generations of our race! Real advance certainly has been made; but still sin, dark and prevalent, has characterized every generation of mankind.

III. THE DIVINE RETRIBUTION ON ACCOUNT OF THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE. 1. *The nature of this retribution.* The elder generation was excluded from the promised land because of their unbelief and rebellion against God and against the leaders whom he had chosen. "I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them," etc. (vers. 15, 16; and cf. Numb. xiv. 26—35; Ps. cvi. 24—26). They disbelieved God's word of promise, and they should not share in its fulfilment; "they despised the pleasant land," and they were not allowed to enter therein; they wished that they had died in the wilderness, and in the wilderness they died. And as to the younger generation, their retribution is thus described: "I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live," etc. (vers. 25, 26). "The 'judgments whereby they should not live' are those spoken of in ver. 18, and are contrasted with the judgments in vers. 13, 21, laws other than Divine, to which God gives up those whom he afflicts with judicial blindness, because they have wilfully closed their eyes (Ps. lxxxi. 12; Rom. i. 24)" ('Speaker's Commentary'). Hengstenberg says, "We may compare here Rom. i. 24, according to which God, in just retribution for their revolt, gave over the heathen to vile affections; Acts vii. 42, where it is traced back to God that the heathen served the host of heaven; and 2 Thess. ii. 11, where God sends the apostates strong delusions. God has so constituted human nature that revolt from him must be followed by total darkness and disorder; that no moderation in error and sin, no standing still at the middle point, is possible; that the man, however willing he might be to stand still, must, against his will, sink from step to step. Revolt from God is the crime, excess in error and moral degradation the merited doom, from which all would willingly escape if this were in their power. By way of example, the custom of sacrificing children is mentioned in ver. 26. 'To cause to pass through' the fire (ver. 31; cf. ch. xvi. 21; xxiii. 37) is the current phrase for sacrificing children which were offered to Moloch. Into such a detestable custom did God in his righteous judgment permit them to fall, that the merited punishment might come upon them ('that I might lay them desolate'), by which they learn that their paternal God, whom they set at nought, is God in the full sense, whom to forsake is at once to fall into misery." 2. *The design of this retribution.* "To the end that they might know that I am the Lord." (See our notes on these words in ch. vi. 7, 10; vii. 4.) We must every one be brought to know him, either by the way of his grace or by the way of his judgments.—W. J.

Vers. 27—29.—*God, and Israel in Canaan.* "Therefore, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God," etc. We have here—

I. GREAT KINDNESS GRACIOUSLY CONFERRED. "I had brought them into the land, which I lifted up mine hand to give unto them." 1. *The Lord gave Canaan unto them, and brought them into it.* "He gave them the lands of the nations; and they took the labour of the peoples in possession" (Ps. cv. 44); "And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land for an inheritance" (Acts xiii. 19). Look at the taking of Jericho as an illustration of this. It was not by human strategy or strength that they obtained the city, but by Divine interposition. And this land was a desirable possession (cf. Numb. xiii. 27; Deut. viii. 7—9; xi. 10—12; and see our notes on ch. xix. 10). 2. *The Lord brought them into Canaan in fulfilment of his promise.* "The land which I lifted up mine hand to give unto them." The lifting up of the hand is the gesture of the oath, or solemn promise. Notwithstanding the rebellions of those to whom the promise was given, and the difficulties in the way of its fulfilment, he made his promise good. His faithfulness and his power guarantee the performance of his word. Here we have ground for confidence in him (cf. Numb. xxiii. 19; Matt. xxiv. 35; 1 Pet. i. 25). 3. *The Lord brought them into Canaan of* *his own unmerited favour.* Though not expressed, this is clearly implied here (cf. Deut. vii. 6—8; ix. 4—6). God's kindness to us has been great and undeserved. Who can count the multitude of his mercies, or estimate their preciousness? "The Lord hath dealt bountifully with us."

II. GREAT KINDNESS BASELY REQUITED. 1. *By worshipping in prohibited places.* "Then they saw every high hill, and all the thick trees, and they offered there their sacrifices," etc. (ver. 28). The margin of the Revised Version presents a more striking signification and a darker guilt. "They looked out for every high hill," etc. Their conduct in this respect was a perversion of a Divine law. "When the Israelites first entered Canaan, they were to set up the *tabernacle* on a *high place*, and upon this and upon no other they were to worship Jehovah. This was *the high place* (1 Sam. ix. 12, etc.; 1 Kings iii. 4). But the Israelites followed the custom of the country, and set up idol-worship on every high hill, and the word 'high-place' (*bamah*), or in the plural 'high-places' (*bamoth*), became a byword (comp. *bamoth Baal*, Josh. xiii. 17)" ('Speaker's Commentary'). This was distinctly forbidden to the Israelites (Deut. xii. 1—14). 2. *By worshipping prohibited objects.* They offered sacrifices to idols. This fact is not explicitly stated in our text; but it is implied in the charge of blasphemy preferred against them, and in the expression, "the provocation of their offering." (1) As to their blasphemy. The attempt "to combine God and idols in one's religion is blasphemy." It involves a fearful disparagement, if not the despising, of the Lord Jehovah. (2) The expression, "the provocation of their offering," indicates the offerings made to idols whereby they provoked God to anger (cf. Deut. xxxii. 16, 17; 1 Kings xiv. 22). "It was an aggravation of their guilt that they not only were idolaters, but defiled with their idolatry the land which was given them for their glory." It was perverting the gracious gift of God to his deep dishonour (cf. Jer. ii. 7). How often have the good gifts of God been thus perverted! Genius and power, rank and riches, have frequently been used for selfish and sinful purposes. And in this and other ways the kindness of God to man is often basely requited still.

III. A SINFUL PEOPLE DIVINELY INTERROGATED. "Then I said unto them, What is the high place whereunto ye go?" Revised Version, "What meaneth the high place?" etc. This inquiry seems to be designed: 1. *To awaken their serious reflection.* It was fitted for this. Perhaps it would lead the idolatrous people to ask themselves, "What meaneth the high place whereunto we go?" Earnest interrogation might lead to profitable consideration. 2. *To lead to their recognition of their folly.* Serious reflection could hardly fail to reveal to them the foolishness of idolatry. What benefit could they derive from it? What could their idols do for them? How unreasonable that reasonable beings should pay homage to things of wood and stone! 3. *To lead to their recognition of their sin.* Their idolatry involved the breach of the most sacred and solemn obligations. It was a transgression of an oft-repeated command of God. Great was both the folly and the sin of the Israelites in this (cf. Jer. ii. 11—13). This inquiry might lead them to perceive and to feel these things. The Most High frequently interrogates sinful men in order to lead them to reflection and reformation (cf. ch. xviii. 31; Jer. ii. 5; iv. 14). "Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

IV. A SINFUL PEOPLE PERSISTING IN SIN NOTWITHSTANDING DIVINE INTERROGATION. "And the name thereof is called Bamah unto this day." The name was continued, and the people persisted in the practice of idolatry despite the remonstrances of the Lord. Even under the most faithful and godly kings the high places were not taken away until Josiah entered upon his great reformation (2 Chron. xxxiv. 3). It is difficult to eradicate sins in the case of individuals, when the sins have had time to strike their roots deeply in the heart and life. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." It is even more difficult to eradicate the widespread, long-continued, deep-rooted sins of a community or a nation.

> "Facilis descensus Averni,
> Sed revocare gradum, superasque wadire ad auras
> Hic labor, hoc opus est."
>
> (Virgil.)

W. J.

Vers. 30—32.—*God, and Israel in the then present.* "Wherefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers?" etc. The Lord Jehovah through his prophet now addresses himself to the Israel of that day, and especially to the elders who had come to the prophet to inquire of him. In these verses he declares their sins. Three chief points claim our attention.

I. THE SINS OF WICKED ANCESTORS PRACTISED BY THEIR SUCCESSORS. 1. *The idolatry of the fathers continued by their children.* "Say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye polluted after the manner of your fathers? and commit ye whoredom after their abominations?" The whoredom spoken of is spiritual—unfaithfulness to God, in the worship of idols. Even the exile in Babylon did not for some time cure the people of this sin. As their fathers had done, so did they. Parental example is very powerful for several reasons. (1) It is the example of those who are most looked up to and imitated by the young. (2) It influences the young in the most impressionable season of their life. "As the twig is bent the tree inclines." (3) It is most continuous in its influence upon the young. "The characters of living parents are constantly presented for the imitation of their children. Their example is continually sending forth a silent power to mould young hearts for good or ill; not for a single month or year, but through the whole impressionable period of childhood and youth, the influence of parental example is thus felt. If it be constituted of the highest and purest elements, the results will be unspeakably precious. Sons and daughters will almost certainly become patterns of propriety and goodness, because their parents are such. If, on the other hand, their example be evil, most injurious will be its effects upon their children. A solemn consideration is this for parents, and one that should be laid to heart by them. It is difficult, moreover, to break away from sins which have obtained a firm hold upon family life and practice. 2. *Idolatry practised even in its most cruel rites.* "For when ye offer your gifts, when ye make your sons to pass through the fire, ye pollute yourselves with all your idols, even unto this day" (see our notes on ch. xvi. 20, 21). 3. *The practice of idolatry defiling the idolater.* "Ye pollute yourselves with all your idols." Worship either elevates or degrades the worshipper, according to the character of the object thereof. Genuine adoration is transforming in its influence upon him who offers it, We become like unto the object or objects of our supreme love and reverence. Hence the worship of the true God purifies, exalts, enriches, ennobles, sanctifies, the worshipper; while the worship of any idol or idols —*e.g.* riches, rank, popularity, power, pleasure—defiles, degrades, and impoverishes the worshipper. Moreover, sin of any kind pollutes the sinner; it stains and defiles his soul (see our notes on ver. 7).

II. THE INQUIRIES OF HYPOCRITES REJECTED BY THE LORD GOD. "Shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you." (We have already considered this topic in our homilies on vers. 1—4 and ch. xiv. 1—11.)

III. THE DARK DESIGNS OF SINNERS DEFEATED BY THE LORD GOD. 1. *Here is a deliberate design formed by man to conform to idolatrous usages.* "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." Thus the house of Israel, the people of the only living and true God, inwardly resolved to conform to heathenish customs, hoping in some way to improve their condition by so doing. And in our day there are those who, while manifesting some respect for religion, yet conform to this world in its questionable and even sinful usages. And some "regard an irreligious condition as preferable to the struggles of a religious life." 2. *Here is man's design to conform to idolatrous usages discovered by the Lord God.* It was in vain for these insincere inquirers of the Lord to think that they could conceal any design from him. And elders of Israel should have known this so well as to be in no danger of overlooking it. But the practice of sin misleads and deceives sinners, and had probably deceived them. God is perfectly acquainted with every thought of the mind of man (ch. xi. 5; Ps. cxxxix. 1—5; Matt. ix. 4; John ii. 24, 25; Heb. iv. 13). 3. *Here is man's design to conform to idolatrous usages defeated by the Lord God.* "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all." Their inward purpose he would frustrate. They might attempt to carry it out, but it would not succeed. "That Israel should become like the heathen," says Schröder, "would be repugnant to the nature of God, especially to his name Jehovah. The very reverse would be much more in harmony with it, namely, that the heathen should become like Israel." The Church of God is not to be conformed to and lost in the world; but the world is to be conformed to the Church and to be included therein. The kingdoms of the world are to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ (Rev. xi. 15). And so the Lord declares that the evil designs of his sinful people should fail. He can utterly foil the deepest, subtlest schemes of man; and he will do so when those schemes are exposed to his holy will (cf. Job v. 12—14; Ps. xxxiii. 10, 11; Prov. xxi. 30; Isa. viii. 10; Acts v. 38, 39).—W. J.

Vers. 33—38.—*The sovereignty of God in the punishment of sin.* "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm," etc. The connection of this paragraph with what has gone before, and especially with ver. 32, is of the closest character; it is, in fact, essential. Three leading points require attention.

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OVER MEN, NOTWITHSTANDING THEIR SINS, ASSERTED. (Ver. 33.) The Israelites had resolved to be as the heathen, to conform to their usages, and to mingle themselves with them. But the Lord does not readily loose them from their allegiance to him. The sins of men do not invalidate the sovereignty of God over them. Men cannot by any means annul his right to rule over them. Moral obligations are eternal. The Lord here asserts: 1. *His solemn determination to maintain his sovereignty over Israel.* "As I live, saith the Lord God, surely . . . will I rule over you." The oath indicates the settled and unchangeable purpose of the Lord Jehovah. He will not forego his kingly authority over his creatures. 2. *His sufficient power to maintain his sovereignty over Israel.* "Surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched-out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you." There is a reference here to his great and terrible acts in the land of Egypt for the deliverance of his people therefrom (cf. Exod. vi. 6; Deut. iv. 34). The Almighty is at no loss for means and instruments to maintain his authority. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder," etc. (Ps. ii. 2—6). If men will not bow to the sceptre of his mercy, they will be made to feel the rod of his anger. "There is no shaking off God's dominion," says M. Henry; "rule he will, either with the golden sceptre or with the iron rod; and those that will not yield to the power of his grace shall be made to sink under the power of his wrath."

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OVER MEN MANIFESTED IN THE PUNISHMENT OF THEIR SINS. (Vers. 34—36.) These verses, we think, should be regarded as figurative. The people of the house of Israel had said within themselves, "We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." The Lord by his prophet declares that they shall not be as the nations; they shall not be lost amongst them; for he will find them out with his judgments. "I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered," etc. There is here a reference to their captivity in Babylon. The objection that they were in one land only, and amongst one people only, whereas the prophet speaks of "peoples" and "countries," is not of much weight, seeing that the Babylonian empire was so great as to be spoken of in the terms applied to it in Jer. xxvii. 1—7. "To those who fancied that with the removal into exile the judicial activity of God was already closed, and the dawn of the day of grace was immediately approaching, he announces a new phase of this judicial activity, similar to that which first came over Israel in the wilderness. If they are really led out of the former state into the new one, in which they underlie a second judgment, *formally* they are led into the wilderness, which here designates a state similar to that in which Israel was formerly in the wilderness. The wilderness is designated as 'the wilderness of the peoples,' in contradistinction to the former wilderness, where was only the howling of wild beasts (Deut. xxxii. 10), lions, serpents, and the like (Deut. viii. 15; Isa. xxx. 6). The new wilderness is one in which Israel is in the midst of the peoples, and can therefore be no ordinary wilderness, for wilderness and peoples exclude one another. It must rather be a symbolic or typical designation of the state of punishment and purification" (Hengstenberg). We have a somewhat similar use of the word "wilderness" in ch. xix. 13 and Hos. ii. 14. What the punishments thus indicated precisely were and when they were inflicted we know not, because of "the defect of historical notices concerning the state of the exiles." Some idea of them may, perhaps, be gathered from the words, "Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God" (cf. Exod. xxxii. 25—29; Numb. xiv. 21—23; xvi. 31—35, 41—49; xxi. 4—6). It is well observed by Greenhill, "That God's punishments are his pleadings; when he visits men for their sins he pleads with them. Every rod of his hath a voice, and pleads for God. Isa. lxvi. 16, 'By fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh.' His punishments are arguments he uses to convince or confound sinners." If men violate God's righteous laws, and set at nought his supreme authority, they must bear the inevitable penalties of their transgressions, and thus realize their subjection to his sovereignty.

III. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OVER MEN MANIFESTED IN THE PUNISHMENT OF THEIR SINS IN ORDER TO LEAD THEM LOYALLY TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOVEREIGNTY. (Vers. 37, 38.) The Divine chastisement was designed to exercise a purifying influence upon the people of Israel, and to lead them back to hearty allegiance to the Lord their God. Two results are here represented as effected by means of it. 1. *Divine discrimination of human characters.* "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." The metaphor of passing under the rod is drawn from pastoral life, and the custom of the sheep passing under the staff of the shepherd to be numbered and examined (cf. Lev. xxvii. 32; Jer. xxxiii. 12, 13; Micah vii. 14). They who thus pass under the rod are the people of God purified by chastisements, known of him, restored to covenant relationship with him, enjoying the privileges and acknowledging the obligations of that covenant. "The Lord knoweth them that are his;" and distinguisheth them from those who are not his. 2. *Divine separation of human persons.* "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and those that transgress against me," etc. (ver. 38). A separation of persons according to their respective characters is here set forth. The sheep will be divided from the goats, the loyal subjects from the hardened rebels. This verse perhaps points, as Scott suggests, "to the whole of the Lord's dealings with Israel, from the time when this prophecy was delivered, to the establishment of a small remnant of them in their own land, after the Captivity; from among whom the idolaters and idolatry itself were completely destroyed, by their manifold desolations, and the terrible havoc made among them." This separation foreshadows that great separation which will be effected at the close of the present economy (cf. Matt. xxv. 31—46; Rev. xxi. 27). Blessed unspeakably will be the lot of those who shall then be found amongst the loyal subjects of the Lord Jehovah. And as for the rebels, they shall know by dread experience that he is the sovereign Lord of all.—W. J.

Vers. 39—44.—*The gracious restoration of the people.* "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God; Go ye, serve ye every one his idols," etc. It is here distinctly recognized that not at once would this reformation and restoration be accomplished. The house of Israel is told to "go, serve ye every one his idols." These words are spoken of as an "ironical conversion" (cf. 1 Kings xxii. 15; Amos iv. 4; Matt. xxiii. 32). They are also described as "the holy irony of him who knows that mercy is laid up for the future." It is important to bear in mind that the words were addressed to the dissimulating elders of Israel. They had come to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord through him, while in their heart they were resolved to "be as the heathen . . . to serve wood and stone." They received such an answer as they were fitted for: "Go ye, serve ye every one his idols." Not quickly are men of such character separated from their sins. Not quickly are the stern lessons of chastisement truly and thoroughly learned by them. Moreover, this ironical concession of their idolatry would perhaps impress them more deeply with the evil thereof than a renewed prohibition or denunciation of it might have done. Then follows the assured declaration of their restoration through the mercy of the Lord God. Of this restoration the more prominent features are these.

I. THEIR RENUNCIATION OF IDOLATRY AND CONSECRATION TO THE LORD JEHOVAH. 1. *The renunciation of their idolatry.* (Ver. 39.) The rendering of the margin of the Revised Version seems to us preferable: "Go ye, serve every one his idols, but hereafter surely ye shall hearken unto me, and my holy Name shall ye no more profane with your gifts, and with your idols." Hengstenberg and the 'Speaker's Commentary' take this view of the verse. "You have pretended," says Greenhill, "that by your idols set up in my stead, and the gifts you have offered to them, or by them to me, that you have honoured my Name, but by joining them and me together, you have polluted my Name." And he declares that this pollution shall cease; that they will abandon their idols. And since their release from the Babylonian captivity, the Jews have never been guilty of idolatry like that mentioned in ver. 32—the service of wood and stone; they have never since then forsaken the Lord God for the idols of heathenism. 2. *Their consecration to the Lord Jehovah.* "For in mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me." Notice: (1) The scene of this service. "In mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel." After the return from the exile the temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt by the Jews, and there they worshipped God. But in the largest and grandest fulfilment of this prophecy the holy mountain is to be understood spiritually (cf. John iv. 20—24). "The spiritual worship of the New Testament," as Schröder observes, "can be well described in the phraseology of the Old Testament worship, by which it was symbolized and prefigured. We still speak of the heavenly Jerusalem" (cf. Isa. ii. 2, 3; Gal. iv. 24—26; Heb. xii. 22). (2) The universality of this service. This is very emphatically expressed here. "There shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve me." Partially this was fulfilled on the return from the exile. "When the Jews had returned from Babylon under Zerubbabel and Ezra, along with those who adhered to them from all the tribes, they formed a unity, possessed a temple at Jerusalem, and became a single people under the same presidency" (Cocceius). But the prophecy yet awaits its complete fulfilment. "All the separation between Israel and Judah shall cease. This points to times yet future, when in Messiah's kingdom Jews and Gentiles alike shall be gathered into one kingdom—the kingdom of Christ (comp. Jer. xxxi.; Mal. iii. 1, etc.; also Rom. xi. 25, 26; Rev. xi. 15) *Jerusalem* is the Church of Christ (Gal. iv. 26), into which the children of Israel shall at last be gathered, and so the prophecy shall be fulfilled (Rev. xxi. 2)" ('Speaker's Commentary'). (3) And as for the nature of this service; they shall worship the living and true God as the only worthy Object of adoration, and they shall obey him as their sovereign Lord.

II. THE ACCEPTATION OF THEMSELVES AND THEIR WORSHIP BY THE LORD JEHOVAH. 1. *The acceptation of themselves.* "There will I accept them. . . . As a sweet savour will I accept you." This acceptation includes: (1) The full forgiveness of all their offences. That he receives the sinner is an evidence that he will remember his sins against him no more. (2) The gracious reception of themselves: that God would regard them with complacency, and enrich them with his favour. When God accepts man he does it heartily and with a glad welcome, even as the father received his prodigal son (Luke xv. 20—24). When we pray, "Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," he speedily answers, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." 2. *The acceptation of their worship.* "There will I require your offerings, and the firstfruits of your oblations, with all your holy things." When the worshippers are themselves accepted, their worship will be accepted also. But when the worshippers are insincere and wicked, the Lord demands of them, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?" etc. (Isa. i. 11—15). It is the contrite and believing heart of the offerer that commends the offerings unto God. Where this state of heart is we may say, with David, "Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness," etc. (Ps. li. 19).

III. GATHERING THEM FROM THEIR EXILE, AND THEIR RESTORATION TO THEIR OWN LAND. 1. *Gathering them from their exile.* "When I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries, wherein ye have been scattered." The Lord does not lose sight of his people when they are scattered abroad. He does not cease to care for them or to protect them. Not one of them shall be lost through any failure on his part (cf. ch. xxxiv. 11—16; John x. 28). 2. *Restoring them to their own land.* "When I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I lifted up mine hand to give unto your fathers." The Jews were restored to their own land after the exile in Babylon. That restoration was a remarkable fulfilment of many prophecies. There is perhaps in the text a reference to another and yet future restoration thither. God by the gospel restores man to his forfeited inheritance. By sin man was exiled from Eden; by the grace of God in Christ Jesus he is introduced into a holier and more beautiful Paradise. "When Divine grace renews the heart of the fallen sinner, Paradise is regained, and much of its beauty restored to the soul."

IV. THEIR GRACIOUS RECOGNITION OF GOD, AND SINCERE REPENTANCE OF THEIR SINS. (The points which arise under this head we have already noticed in our homily on ch. vi. 8—10.) 1. *Their gracious recognition of the Lord God.* "And ye shall know that I am the Lord," etc. (vers. 42, 44). This knowledge does not spring from his judgments, but from the experience of his gracious dealings. It is a sympathetic and saving acquaintance with him. 2. *Sincere repentance of their sins.* (1) Here is a prerequisite to true repentance. "There shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled." (2) Here is an essential characteristic of true repentance. "And ye shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed." In genuine penitence the sinner reproaches himself because of his sins.

V. AND IN ALL THESE FEATURES OF THIS RESTORATION WE HAVE AN IMPRESSIVE AND BEAUTIFUL ILLUSTRATION OF THE UNMERITED GRACE OF GOD. "Ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my Name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God." All our blessings flow to us from the inexhaustible fountain of the grace of God. Mankind has merited no good from him. Our "evil ways and corrupt doings" have deserved his unmixed wrath. But in his infinite mercy he has spared our guilty race, enriched us with many physical and mental blessings, and provided for us an eternal and glorious salvation through the gift of his beloved Son. And as this restoration of his people originated in his grace, it shall redound to his glory. "I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations" (ver. 41); "I have wrought with you for my Name's sake" (ver. 44); "In them as a holy people, anew consecrated to God, shall be exhibited to the heathen the holiness of Jehovah." And the redemption of man by Jesus Christ shall issue in the eternal glory of the God of all grace (Gal. i. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 18; Heb. xiii. 20, 21; 1 Pet. v. 10, 11; Rev. vii. 9—12).

> "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
> But unto thy Name give glory,
> For thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."

W. J.

Vers. 45—49 and ch. xxi. 1—7.—*A parable of judgment.* "Moreover the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face toward the south," etc. Another chapter should certainly have been commenced at the forty-fifth verse of the twentieth chapter, as indeed it is in the Hebrew, LXX., and Vulgate. The first seven verses of the twenty-first chapter in the Authorized Version are an explanation of the parable of the preceding five verses.

I. THE AUTHOR OF THIS JUDGMENT. 1. *Divinely declared.* "Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee" (ver. 47); "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked" (ch. xxi. 3). The Divine authorship of the judgments coming upon Jerusalem has been asserted already by the prophet many times in ch. v., vi., vii., etc., in which places we have noticed the fact. The Chaldeans were the unconscious instruments in the hand of God for accomplishing this judgment. He was himself the Author of it. 2. *Generally recognized.* "And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it: it shall not be quenched" (ver. 48); "That all flesh may know that I the Lord have drawn forth my sword out of its sheath: it shall not return any more" (ch. xxi. 5). The irresistibleness of the judgment would lead men to conclude that the Author of it was the Almighty. "If we see that all human plans and devices, even the most promising, come to nothing, we are led to the confession that we have to do with personal omnipotence and righteousness, against which the battle is unavailing." There are some disasters and distresses in which the thoughtful observer is almost compelled to recognize the presence and the power of the Supreme.

II. THE SUBJECTS OF THIS JUDGMENT. "Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field;

and say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Behold I will kindle a fire in thee. . . . Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel; and say to the land of Israel, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I am against thee," etc. Ezekiel was now in Chaldea, of which the prophets generally spoke as the north country; not because it was strictly north of Palestine, but because its armies entered Palestine from the north by way of Syria, and in returning they travelled by the same northern way. Hence the south denotes Jerusalem and the land of Israel. And the people are spoken of as "the forest of the south." It has been suggested that the figure of a forest is employed in order to denote the density of the population. Others have suggested that it is used to indicate the fact that the people had degenerated from a noble vine or a fruitful field to an unproductive forest. But this at least is certain, that the judgment was about to be inflicted upon the Holy Land, the royal and sacred city, and the people chosen of God. Their former favours will not screen them from the righteous retribution of their sins. Their privileges will rather aggravate their punishment. They had presumed upon those privileges; they had abused God's great goodness to them; and because they had done these things his judgment upon them will be all the more terrible. Here is solemn admonition to those who occupy eminent positions or possess exceptional privileges (cf. Matt. xi. 20—24).

III. THE NATURE OF THIS JUDGMENT. 1. *It is destructive in its character.* "Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree. . . . Behold, I am against thee, and will draw forth my sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked." Fire and sword are employed to denote all the miseries and terrors which came upon the people in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. Famine and pestilence, slaughter and captivity, then fell fiercely upon the people (cf. ch. v., vi., vii.). 2. *It is general in its infliction.* The fire "shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree, . . and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. . . . I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall my sword go forth out of its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north." In national judgments the righteous suffer with the wicked, and the innocent with the guilty, so far as the outward calamities are concerned. But though the outward event be the same to all, its inward character is not. The righteous shall not be as the wicked. "God's graces and comforts make a great difference when his providence seems to make none." So that this general character of the judgment "is not in contradiction with ch. ix. 4, according to which the righteous amid the impending catastrophe are the object of the protecting and sustaining activity of God. For if two suffer the same, yet it is not the same. To those who love God must *all things* be for the best (Rom. viii. 28)" (Hengstenberg). 3. *It is irresistible in its might.* "The flaming flame shall not be quenched. . . . I the Lord have drawn forth my sword out of its sheath: it shall not return any more." The Jews in Jerusalem imagined that, with the aid of Egypt, they could safely bid defiance to the Chaldean forces; but those forces utterly overwhelmed them. When God is against either a man or a nation, they are unable to stand before their enemies. "Hast thou an arm like God? and canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?" "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way," etc. (Ps. ii. 12).

IV. THE DISINCLINATION OF MEN TO CREDIT THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THIS JUDGMENT. "Thou said, I, Ah Lord God! they say of me, Doth he not speak parables?" Notice: 1. *The mean attempt to cast upon the prophet the blame which was due to themselves.* They said of the prophet, "Is he not a speaker of parables?" They did not want to understand his announcements to them. They could have understood them without difficulty had they been disposed to do so. The truths which he proclaimed were displeasing to them, and they would not recognize them. Then they disingenuously complained of the form in which he expressed his message "Is he not a speaker of parables?" Their conduct in this respect finds its analogue in some hearers of the Christian ministry in our day. If the preacher's style is figurative, he is too obscure—"a speaker of parables;" if it be plain and unadorned, he is too simple and homely;

if it be logical, he is too dry; if it be fervid, he is too enthusiastic. They blame the preacher when the fault is in themselves—they are out of sympathy with his message. 2. *The adequate resource of a faithful servant of God when subject to discouragement.* He can do as Ezekiel did, state his difficulties and trials to his Divine Master, and obtain from him consolation and inspiration. There are experiences in the lives of Christian ministers when nothing remains for them but to seek the aid of him from whom they received their commission. They shall never seek his aid in vain, or find it insufficient.

V. THE GRACE OF GOD IN GIVING REPEATED AND IMPRESSIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THIS JUDGMENT. When the prophet complained to the Lord that the people spake of him as "a speaker of parables," he was not commanded to abandon them to their doom, but to deliver his message again and in another form. The merciful God was patient with the perverse people. 1. *Here are repeated announcements of this judgment.* Two are given in our text. Several have been already given by the prophet. And subsequently he delivered not a few. And in addition to these, Jeremiah was proclaiming in Jerusalem the approaching doom. God does not leave the wicked without many warnings of the consequences of their conduct. 2. *Here are impressive announcements of this judgment.* (1) The spoken parable (vers. 47, 48). This was fitted to awaken attention, stimulate inquiry, and thus produce a deeper and more lasting impression of the truth conveyed. (2) The acted sign. "Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins," etc. (ch. xxi. 6, 7). This also was with the view of interesting the people, and leading them to ask, "Wherefore sighest thou?" As Hengstenberg observes, "The endeavour is everywhere visible, to obtain by the clearness of the description a representation of the reality not yet existing, but already germinating, and in this way to withdraw the people from their delusions, and make penitence take the place of politics."

VI. THE DISMAY OF THE PEOPLE ON THE ACTUAL ARRIVAL OF THIS JUDGMENT. "Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord God." "They shall be compelled to experience in themselves what they perceive in the prophet. In all, courage gives place to terror, activity to prostration, counsel to perplexity. No one holds out any longer (cf. ch. vii. 17)" (Schröder). The wicked who have been most self-confident and boastfully secure in time of peace and prosperity, will be most prostrate and terror-stricken when confronted by stern calamity and distress. "The sound of a driven leaf shall chase them." Having forsaken God, and being deprived of the strength and courage of a calm and clear conscience, "terrors overtake them like waters," and utterly overwhelm them. If sinners persistently reject the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, the time will come when in abject dismay they will vainly seek to hide themselves "from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 15—17). Therefore "seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near," etc. (Isa. lv. 6, 7).—W. J.

EXPOSITION.

CHAPTER XXI.

Vers. 2, 3.—The opening words, reproducing those of ch. xx. 46, indicate that the interpretation of that parable is coming. So the three variants of "south" are shown to mean respectively Jerusalem, the holy places, and the land of Israel. So, in ver. 3, the righteous and the wicked take the place of the "green" and the "dry" tree, and the fire is explained as meaning the sword of the invader. The teaching of ch. xviii. had shown that Ezekiel had entered, as regards the ultimate judgment of individual men, into the spirit of Abram's words "That be far from thee to destroy the righteous with the wicked" (Gen. xviii. 25). But in regard to temporal judgments there would be, in this case, as in the complaint of Job ix. 22, no distinction. The sword went forth "against all flesh."

Ver. 6.—**Sigh therefore, etc.** As in other instances (ch. iv. 4; v. 1—4), the prophet dramatizes the coming calamity. He is to act the part of a mourner, whose sighs are so deep that they seem to "break his loins" (compare, for the gesture, Nah. ii. 1, 10; Isa. xxi. 3; Jer. xxx. 6). The strange action was meant to lead to questions. What did it mean? And then he is to answer that he does it "for the tidings" which are to him as certain as if they had already come. He is but doing what all would do, when the messenger brought word, as in ch. xxxiii. 21, five years later, that the city was at last smitten.

Vers. 8, 9.—A sword, a sword, etc. The new section (vers. 9—17) rises out of the thought of the unsheathed sword in ver. 3. More than most other portions of Ezekiel's writings, it assumes a distinctly lyrical character, and might be headed, "The Lay of the Sword of Jehovah." The opening words are probably an echo of Deut. xxxii. 41. The dazzling brightness of the sword is added to its sharpness as a fresh element of terror.

Ver. 10.—The sceptre of my son, etc. The clause is obscure, possibly corrupt, and has received many interpretations. (1) Taking the received text, the most probable explanation is that given by Keil and Kliefoth: *Shall we rejoice* (saying), *The sceptre of my son despiseth all woods.* Here the "rod" is the "sceptre" of the tribe of Judah (Gen. xlix. 10), and the words are supposed to be spoken by those who hear of the destroying sword. They need not dread the sword, they say, because the sceptre of the house of David, whom Jehovah recognizes as his son, despises all wood, looks on every other rod that is the symbol of sovereignty, with scorn. It is urged, in favour of this interpretation, that ver. 27 contains an unmistakable reference to the prophetic words of Gen. xlix. 10. (2) Ewald: *It is no weak rod of my son, the softest of all wood;* i.e. the sword of Jehovah is no weak weapon such as might be used for the chastisement of a child (Prov. x. 13; xiii. 24). (3) Hengstenberg: *Shall we rejoice over the rod of my son, despising every tree?* There is no cause for anything but the reverse of joy in the rod, the punishment which God appoints for Israel as his son, and which surpasses all others in its severity. (4) The Authorized Version and Revised Version (margin) make the "sword" the nominative, and the words are those of Jehovah: *It contemneth the rod* (i.e. the sceptre) *of my son, as it contemns every other tree* (i.e. as in ch. xx. 4), *every other national sovereignty.* (5) The Revised Version and Authorized Version (margin): *It* (the sword) *is the rod of my son* (appointed for his chastisement), *and it despiseth every tree,* in same sense as in (4). (5) Cornill, altering the text, almost rewriting it, gets the meaning: *It* (the sword) *is for men who murder and plunder, and regard not any strength.* Neither the LXX. nor the Vulgate help us, the former giving, "Slay, set at naught, reject every tree;" and the latter, "Thou who guidest the sceptre of my son, thou hast cut down." On the whole, (1) seems to rest on better ground than the others.

Ver. 12.—Terrors by reason of the sword; better, as in the Revised Version and margin of the Authorized Version, *They* (the princes of Judah, corresponding to the "rod" of ver. 10) *are delivered over to the sword with my people.* At this stage, in contemplating the destruction alike of princes and of people, the prophet is bidden to make his gestures of lamentation yet more expressive, "crying, howling, smiting on his thigh" (Jer. xxxi. 19).

Ver. 13.—Because it is a trial, etc. The verse has received as many interpretations, and is just as obscure as ver. 10, with which it is obviously connected. I begin as before with that which seems most probable. (1) Keil: *For the trial is made, and what if the despising sceptre shall not come?* The "despising sceptre" is the kingdom of Judah, and the prophet asks, "What will happen, what extreme of misery is to be looked for, if that kingdom shall not appear, if Judah shall be left without a ruler? (2) Ewald: *For it is tried—and what? Whether it is also a soft rod! That will not be.* So men will find on trial that the sword of Jehovah is not a soft rod, but the sharpest of all weapons. (3) Hengstenberg: *And how? Shall the despising rod that outstript all other punishments not be?* i.e. shall the sword of Jehovah not do its work effectively? (4) Cornill, in part following Hitzig, again rewrites the text, and gets the meaning: *How should I judge with favour? They have not turned themselves from their pollution. They shall find no place.* (5) The Authorized Version inserts the word "sword," apparently with the meaning that the "trial" will show that the sword of the Lord contemns the rod, *i.e.* the sceptre of Judah, and that that rod shall be no more. (6) The Authorized Version (margin): *When the trial hath been, what then? Shall not they also belong to the despising rod?* may have had a meaning for those who adopted it, but I fail to find it. (7) The Revised Version relegates the Authorized Version text into the margin, and substitutes, *For there is a trial, and what if even the rod that contemneth* (i.e. the sceptre of Judah) *shall be no more?* (8) The LXX and Vulgate connect "because there is a trial" with the preceding clause, rendering it respectively, "for it has been justified (*δεδικαίωται*)," and "because it has been tested (*probatus*)," and translate what follows—the LXX., "What if even a tribe be repulsed? It shall not be;" and the Vulgate, "And this whe it (the sword!) has overturned the kingd and it shall not be," etc. This will be a sufficient summary of the difficulties of the exegetical problem. At the best, we must say that it remains unsolved.

Ver. 14.—**Smite thine hands together, etc.** Another gesture follows, either of horror and lamentation, or perhaps, looking to ver. 17, of imperative command. The sword is to do its thrice-redoubled work (the words emphasize generally the intensity, and are scarcely to be taken numerically, of the repeated invasions of the Chaldeans); it is "the sword of the slain" (better, *pierced ones*, or, with Revised Version, *the deadly wounded*). The next clause should be taken, with the Revised Version, in the singular—*the sword of the great one that is deadly wounded; sc.* the sword should smite the king as well as the people. For **entereth into their privy chambers**, read, with the Revised Version (margin), Ewald, and Keil, *it compasseth them about.*

Ver. 15.—**For their ruins shall be multiplied**, read, with the Revised Version, *that their stumblings;* and for **wrapped up**, *pointed*, or *sharpened.*

Ver. 16.—**Go thee one way or another, etc.**; *i.e.* as in the following, *to the right hand or the left*—to the north or the south. Whichever way the prophet turned (ch. xx. 47), he would see nothing but the sword and its work of slaughter. Jehovah had given that command with the gesture of supreme authority. He would not rest till he had appeased his wrath by letting it work itself out even to the end. With these words the "Lay of the Sword of Jehovah" ends, and there is again an interval of silence.

Vers. 17—19.—The new section opens in a different strain. Ezekiel sees, as in vision, Nebuchadnezzar and his army on their march. He is told to appoint (better, *make*, or *mark*, as on a brick or tile, as in ch. iv. 1) a place where the road bifurcated. Both come from one land, *i.e.* from Babylon; but from that point onwards one road led to Rabbath, the capital of the Ammonites (Deut. iii. 11; 2 Sam. xi. 1), the other to Jerusalem. Apparently, the exiles and the people of Judah flattered themselves that the former was the object of the expedition. The answer to that false hope is a vivid picture of what was passing in the council of war which Nebuchadnezzar was holding at that parting of the ways. The prophet sees, as it were, the sign-post pointing, as with a hand, to each of the two cities. The king consults his soothsayers, and uses divinations. Of these Ezekiel enumerates three: (1) *He shakes the arrows to and fro* (Revised Version). This was known among the Greeks as the *βέλομαντεία*. The arrows were put into a quiver, with names (in this case probably Rabbath and Jerusalem) written on them. One was then drawn, or thrown, out as by chance, and decided the direction of the campaign. (2) He consults the *images* (Hebrew, *teraphim*). The *modus operandi* in this case is not known, but Judg. xviii. 18 and Hos. iii. 4 point to some such use of them. (3) There remains the sacrifice and the inspection of the liver, familiar alike in Greek, Etrurian, and Roman divination (Cicero, 'De Divin.,' vi. 13).

Ver. 22.—**At his right hand was, etc.**; better, *into his right hand came, etc.*; *sc.* the arrow marked for Jerusalem was that which came into the king's hand as the quiver was shaken. **To appoint captains**; better, *battering-rams*, in both clauses. The same Hebrew word is used in both (see note on ch. iv. 2). The verse paints the engineering operations of the besiegers, following on the issue of the divination. (For the mount, comp. Isa. xxxvii. 33.)

Ver. 23.—The whole verse is obscure, and has been very variously interpreted. I follow the translation of the Revised Version, and explain it by inserting words which are needed to bring out its meaning: *It* (what Nebuchadnezzar has done) *shall be as a vain divination in their sight* (*sc.* in that of the men of Jerusalem), *which have sworn unto them* (*sc.* have taken oaths of fealty to the Chaldeans, and are ready to take them again), *but he* (Nebuchadnezzar) *brings iniquity to remembrance.* The fact represented is that when the people of Jerusalem heard of the divination at the parting of the ways, they still lulled themselves in a false security. They and Zedekiah had sworn obedience, and that oath would protect them. "Not so," rejoins the prophet; "the Chaldean king knows how those oaths have been kept." The LXX. omits all reference to "oaths." The Vulgate, taking the word for "oath" in its other sense of "sabbath," gives the curious rendering, *Eritque quasi consulens frustra oraculum in eorum oculis, et sabbatorum otium imitans.* In spite of the reports that reached them, the men of Jerusalem thought themselves as safe as if the Chaldean king were keeping a sabbath day. Ewald partly follows the Vulgate, and renders, *They believe they have weeks on weeks*, i.e. will not believe that the danger is close at hand. Keil and Hävernick: *Oaths of oaths are theirs;* i.e. they count on the oath of Jehovah, on his promises of protection, but he (Jehovah) brings iniquity to remembrance. **That they may be taken**; *i.e.* be seized by the invader and either slain or made prisoners.

Ver. 24.—The prophet adds words which in part explain those that precede. The iniquity of the people has forced, not the

Chaldean king only, but Jehovah himself, to remember and to punish them.

Ver. 25.—And thou, profane wicked prince of Judah, etc.; better, with the Revised Version, *O deadly wounded*, etc., as in ver. 29, where the same word is translated in the Authorized Version as "slain." The Authorized Version follows the LXX. and Vulgate, apparently in order to make the word fit in with the fact that Zedekiah was not slain, but carried into exile. The word "deadly wounded," or "sorely smitten," may rightly be applied to one who fell, as Zedekiah did, from his high estate. From the sins of the people the prophet turns to the special guilt of Zedekiah, who had proved unfaithful alike to Jehovah and to the Chaldean king, whom he had owned as his suzerain. His day had at last come, the time of the iniquity of the end of the last transgression which was to bring down on him the final punishment.

Ver. 26.—Remove the diadem, etc. The noun is used throughout the Pentateuch (*e.g.* Exod. xxviii. 4; xxxvii. 39; Lev. viii. 9; xvi. 4) for the "turban" or "mitre" of the high priest, and Keil so takes it here, as pointing to the punishment of the priest as well as of the king. **This shall not be the same**; literally, *this shall not be this*; or, as the Revised Version paraphrases, *this shall be no more the same;* i.e. the mitre and the crown shall alike pass away—taken from their unworthy wearers. There was to be, as in the following words, a great upturning of all things; the high brought low, the lowly exalted.

Ver. 27.—I will overthrow. The sentence of destruction is emphasized, after the Hebrew manner, by a threefold iteration (Isa. vi. 3; Jer. xxii. 29). **It shall be no more.** The pronoun in both clauses probably refers to the established order of the kingdom and the priesthood. "That order," Ezekiel says, "shall be no more." Keil, however, takes the second "it"—the "this" of the Revised Version—as meaning the fact of the overthrow. That also was not final; all things were as in a state of flux till the Messianic kingdom hinted at in the next clause should restore the true order. **Until he come whose right it is.** The words contain a singularly suggestive allusion to Gen. xlix. 10, where a probable interpretation of the word "Shiloh" is "he to whom it belongs;" or, as the LXX. gives it, τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῷ. The passage is noticeable as being Ezekiel's first distinct utterance of the hope of a personal Messiah. Afterwards, in ch. xxxiv. 23, it is definite enough.

Ver. 28.—Thus saith the Lord God concerning the Ammonites. Ezekiel has not forgotten that scene at the parting of the ways The Ammonites, when they saw the issue of the divination, and the march of the Chaldean army to the west, thought themselves safe. They took up their reproach against Jerusalem, and exulted in its fall. They are warned, as in another strophe of the "Lay of the Sword of Jehovah," that their confidence is vain (comp. Zeph. ii 8 for a like exultation at an earlier period).

Ver. 29.—Whiles they see, etc. The words may possibly refer to Nebuchadnezzar's diviners in ver. 21, but more probably to those whom the Ammonites themselves consulted. The pronoun "thee" in both clauses refers to Ammon. The result of those who divined falsely was that the sword would be drawn against the necks of the Ammonites and throw them upon the heap of the slaughtered ones. For them, as in the words that end the verse, reproducing those of ver. 25, punishment is decreed, and that punishment will come.

Ver. 30.—Shall I cause it, etc.? The question of the Authorized Version suggests a negative answer, as though the speaker were Jehovah, and the sheath that of his sword. The Revised Version, which translates it, with Keil, the LXX., and the Vulgate, as an imperative, deals with it as addressed to the Ammonites. They are told to sheath their sword; it would be of no avail against the sharp, glittering weapon of Jehovah. Their judgment would soon come on them in their own land, not, as in the case of Judah, in the form of exile (comp. ch. xxv. 1—8 as an expansion of the prophet's thought).

Ver. 31.—I will blow against, etc. The imagery of fire takes the place of that of the sword. The brutish men (same word as in Ps. xlix. 10; xcii. 6) are the Chaldean conquerors. The fact that the adjective may also mean "those that burn" may, in part, have determined Ezekiel's choice of it.

Ver. 32.—For Ammon there is no hope of a restoration like that which Ezekiel speaks of as possible for Jerusalem, and even for Sodom and Samaria. Its doom is written in the words, **it shall be no more remembered** (comp. ch. xxv. 7).

HOMILETICS.

Ver. 4.—*The common fate of righteous and wicked.* Both the righteous and the wicked are to be cut off. Though not equal in moral character, they are to share in the same general calamities.

I. IT IS A FACT THAT THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER WITH THE WICKED. We see this fact in everyday experience, and it would be a falsehood to formulate a doctrine which seemed to our short-sighted judgment more just, if it did interpret events. 1. *From human conduct.* The bad policy of a king brings war and its attendant miseries on a whole nation. The crime of a father bequeaths poverty, shame, and misery to his whole family. 2. *From natural calamities.* An earthquake will shake down a church upon the heads of the most devout worshippers, with as terrible a slaughter as that which follows the overthrow of some theatre of sinful revelry.

II. THE COMMON LIFE OF MANKIND NECESSITATES THIS COMMON FATE. There is a certain solidarity of man. We are members one of another, so that if one member suffers, all the members suffer. This is one penalty we pay for the union with our fellow-men which on the whole is immensely helpful. Without such a union there would be no society, no organic connection between individuals. The rich, full life that grows out of the mutual ministries of man would then be impossible.

III. IT IS AN AGGRAVATION OF A CALAMITY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS SHARE THE FATE OF THE WICKED. The wicked could well be spared, and it might seem to be a good thing for the world that their places should be vacant; but every good man has his good work which suffers when he is taken away. The guilt of those who bring disaster on the innocent is all the greater on this account. No worse thing can happen to a people than that its saving elements should be taken away. They are the salt of the land.

IV. THE RIGHTEOUS WHO SUFFER WITH THE WICKED ARE NOT ULTIMATELY INJURED. The injustice is temporary. 1. *The outward suffering is an inward blessing.* The physical nature of the suffering may be the same in both cases; but its moral character differs entirely according as it is deserved or not. When it falls on innocent men it is not punishment; there is no curse in it; it comes as the fire that purges the silver. 2. *The temporary suffering will be followed by eternal blessedness.* We may say of the righteous and the sinful who were victims of a common calamity, "In their death they were not divided." But *after* death there is a swift and searching separation. Then it is seen that the righteous were taken from the evil to come.

V. THE COMMON FATE OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED MAY BE A MEANS OF SAVING BOTH. It was so in the Captivity. Good men like Daniel and "The Three Children" were taken to Babylon together with the corrupt courtiers of Jerusalem, and there they maintained the flame of ancient Hebrew piety, so as to prepare for a renewed people's restoration. Christ died the sinner's death that he might save the sinner, after he himself had been raised up from the dead in victory over sin.

Ver. 9.—*The sword of war.* I. THE SWORD OF WAR BRINGS FEARFUL TROUBLE. When the hoarded judgment bursts over the head of the guilty nation of Israel, it falls in the form of war. Those people who speak lightly of war as being "good for trade," as "opening careers for men," and as "developing manly virtues," etc., would do well to consider that the fearful monster is regarded in the Bible as the worst of plagues. David was a man of war, and he knew what its horrors meant. It was with no nervous fear like that of King James who shuddered at the sight of a sword, with no sentimental tremors of an effeminate nature, that the old warrior David chose the horrors of a pestilence in preference to those of war. Note some of its evils. 1. *Destructiveness.* It must be a fallacy to regard it as "good for trade." Whatever temporary and artificial fillip commerce may receive during the actual campaign is paid for ten times over by the subsequent collapse. England was thrown back for generations by the Napoleonic wars. The soldiers are withdrawn from productive work; ordinary commerce is stopped; and a vast amount of property is directly destroyed. 2. *Suffering.* Every one who has witnessed the scenes of a battle-field turns from the recollection of them with loathing and horror. War is not a pageant of drums and trumpets and flying banners; it is a huge Inferno of groans and agonizing deaths. Thousands lie wounded on the field, some trampled on by charging steeds, some anguished for want of the drop of water which cannot be reached, sick with the blazing heat of the sun or chilled to the marrow in snow and frost. Thousands are cut off in the flower of their youth, sent prematurely to the grave before their real life-work is begun. And every death means a household of bitter mourning in the old home. 3. *Wickedness.* War lets loose the lowest passions. Hatred and bloodthirsty vengeance are engendered, and men are brought down to the level of wild brutes. Too often savage lust follows, and the vilest outrages are committed.

II. THE SWORD OF WAR MAY BE USED AS A DIVINE CHASTISEMENT. 1. *Sharpened by sin.* National misconduct lays a people open to the ravages of war. The curse may be earned immediately by insolent and unrighteous dealings with other nations; or it may be brought less directly and not as we could anticipate. Yet the awful fact remains—National sin necessitates national judgment, and the most awful and yet the most common national judgment is war. 2. *Directed by God.* This was the case with the wars of judgment that visited Israel. Israel's sin sharpened the sword, but God's hand guided it. For the providence of God cannot be excluded, even from so lawless and monstrous a thing as war. (1) *This adds to its terror.* It is fearful to know that God wills us to suffer from so dire a calamity. Then there can be no escaping it. (2) *This suggests hope of final rescue.* Wherever God is, love is. The God of battles is the God of Bethlehem. He who sends the war to scourge also sends the gospel to save.

Ver. 17.—*The satisfaction of God's fury.* This is a most awful subject. Gladly would we leave it alone. Oh for a fresh sight of God's eternal love, instead of this horror of great darkness, this vision of wrath and judgment unrestrained and fully satisfied! Yet the fearful words are before us and they invite our earnest regard.

I. GOD'S FURY IS FEARFULLY PROVOKED BY SIN. It is only against sinners that these dreadful words are written. The righteous may share the temporal calamities that smite the wicked (ver. 4), but they incur none of the wrath of God that lies behind those calamities. Nevertheless, as we are all sinners, there is little comfort in this thought. Consider how greatly sin provokes wrath. 1. *It is committed in full daylight.* The Jews possessed the land. We know Christ. We cannot plead ignorance. Even the heathen have accusing consciences. 2. *It is committed against love.* We sin against our Father, to whom we owe everything, and who has been infinitely gracious to us. 3. *It is committed in spite of warnings.* Israel had her grand procession of minatory prophets from Elijah to Ezekiel. We have the warnings of the Bible. 4. *It is committed without necessity.* There is a better way and a happier. Nothing but the most wilful perversity can make us choose the evil path. A saving hand has been held out to protect us. When we sin we reject that help. 5. *It is committed after God's long-suffering has been tried.* He has long refrained from punishing. Yet men have made his long-suffering an excuse for greater sin. Thus they have "treasured up wrath for the day of wrath."

II. GOD'S FURY CANNOT BE RESISTED. 1. *It cannot be opposed by man's powers.* The sinner has to contend with the Almighty and the All-wise. The stoutest must fall in such a contest, and the most cunning must fail in the foolish attempt to outwit God. 2. *It cannot be opposed by any excuses.* Unhappily, there is no doubt as to the guilt of the sinner. He had opportunities of return, and he rejected them. Conscience must paralyze resistance. 3. *It cannot be opposed by God's love.* There is no schism in the nature of God. Love itself must approve of wrath directed against hardened impenitence.

III. GOD'S FURY WILL BE SATISFIED. 1. *It will not fail.* Nothing that God attempts can fail. This we may infer as a conclusion from the observations under the previous head. 2. *It will not endure for ever.* When it has accomplished its work it will rest. It may be that some of the results of it will endure for ever. The slain man will not arise again on earth, but he is not being killed continuously. The ruined city may never be rebuilt, and yet the earthquake that overthrew temples and palaces has long subsided, and all is now still and calm. 3. *It will be satisfied when it has accomplished its end.* God's fury is not like his love. It does not spring unprovoked from his own heart. It is roused by sin, and when it has punished sin, it is satisfied. But this is the most awful satisfaction of it. There is another satisfaction, viz.: 4. *It will be satisfied when it is propitiated.* This is not stated in the verse before us. But it is the burden of the gospel. Christ our Advocate propitiates the wrath of God (1 John ii. 1, 2). Then if we have confessed our sin, and sought the saving help of Christ, we need fear the wrath of God no longer. It is satisfied.

Ver. 24.—*Transgressions discovered.* I. TRANSGRESSIONS ARE DISCOVERED BY GOD

AS SOON AS THEY ARE COMMITTED. He is present when the deeds are done; his eyes are always open to observe the conduct of his creatures; he is not negligent of sin. We start, therefore, with the position that there is no such thing as secret sin. The appearance of secrecy arises from the fact that the great Witness withholds his evidence for the present. Such a position leads to the inevitable conclusion that some day the most hidden evil may be made manifest. God holds the key, and he will unlock the door whenever he sees fit.

II. TRANSGRESSIONS WILL BE DISCOVERED TO THE UNIVERSE IN THE FUTURE JUDGMENT. This must be what the judgment really means. We have been accustomed to the picture of a vast assize, as though God needed to go through the forms of a criminal trial with souls, every secret of whom has been perfectly known to him from the first. Such a trial would be an empty form, a mere theatrical display. But God will make the justice of his action apparent to all, and in doing so the secrets of all hearts will be revealed.

III. TRANSGRESSIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE DISCOVERED ON EARTH. It is scarcely possible for a man to play the hypocrite successfully till his secret is sealed in death. At some moment of inadvertency he is almost certain to lift the mask, and then the discovery of his deceit, once made, will destroy for ever the reputation of years. Sin will work its fruits in the bad man's life. Though never confessed in words, it is expressed in tone and temper. The very features of the countenance set themselves to the character of the life within. Moreover, sudden surprises and unexpected turns of events will reveal a man to the world. The long-buried secret comes to light. Achan's Babylonish garment is brought to light (Josh. vii. 18—20). Ananias and Sapphira cannot conceal their lie (Acts v. 9). Eugene Aram cannot hide the corpse of his victim. Dimsdale is driven to reveal the scarlet letter that burns in fire on his breast.

IV. TRANSGRESSIONS MAY BE HIDDEN BY FORGIVENESS. In the expressive Hebrew phrase, they are then said to be "covered." The only way to have our transgression thus buried out of sight is for us first to confess it to God. Thus we need to pray that he will search us and try us, and see if there be any wicked way in us (Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24). Until our sins are brought home to our consciences, there is no hope that they will be permanently hidden. If we forget them, God will remember them. For God to forget them we must first remember them. When transgressions are thus owned to God, we are in the condition to receive his pardon, after which we may take the assurance, "Your sins and iniquities will I remember no more." The sins are then banished "as far as the east is from the west." They are "buried in the depth of the sea." God does not goad his restored children with their old sins.

Ver. 27.—*Revolution and restoration.* I. REVOLUTION. God overturns Israel and its institutions by repeated acts in the successive invasions of Nebuchadnezzar. The ruin is utter. No city has sustained so many sieges as Jerusalem, or has been so often sacked and destroyed. Now, we are reminded that these terrible disasters are elements in a Divine judgment and discipline. It is *God* who overturns. There is, therefore, a providential purpose in the event. 1. *Revolution must precede restoration.* The Divine education of mankind is not a continuous, unbroken development. The earthquake has its mission as truly as the April shower. Evil must be overthrown before good can be built up. This may mean a violent process. We are too mild in some of our methods of treating sin. Undoubtedly, God has not committed his sword of judgment to us, but he expects his servants to testify against sin, and so to pull down the strong walls of Satan. Aggressive work is absolutely necessary. While we preach the gospel of peace, we have also to fight against intemperance, commercial corruption, and all evil customs and institutions. 2. *This revolution must be universal.* There is a sweeping comprehensiveness in our text. Political revolutions, indeed, may not be called for, for now we have to engage in spiritual work. But there must be revolution in every region of life. (1) *In the heart.* Old prejudices and habits must be thrown down—every mountain made low. (2) *In the Church.* Christ cleansed the temple. The Reformation was a great overturning. Much in the Church now needs to be overturned; *e.g.* worldly practices, human inventions, false ideas, Christless journalism, etc. (3) *In society.* The apostles were regarded as firebrand revolutionists, who "turned the world upside down." Social injustice must be overturned, not, perhaps, by

"Red Republicanism," but by Christian brotherhood. We must not suppose that God will let the monstrous evils of Christendom go on for ever. He will overturn much before we can see the millennium. The new wine cannot be contained in the old bottles.

II. RESTORATION. 1. *The revolution prepares for a restoration.* Mere destruction perfects nothing. It is necessary only as preliminary to something constructive. Blank nihilism is the most barren philosophy. The "everlasting no" is not a gospel for hungry humanity. After the revolution there must be a new order, and after repentance there must be a new life. 2. *The restoration can only be accomplished by Christ.* Until Christ came the Jews were never truly restored, though they had returned to their land. In Christ Israel had its long hoped-for redemption (Luke ii. 29, 30), though, alas! most of the nation rejected it, and left it to others. It is easy to demolish an ancient effete system. The difficulties begin with building up a new and better one. We cannot establish a new social order, nor can we even stir up a better life in our own breasts. The weary world waits for the full coming of Christ to restore its overturned peace and order. 3. *This restoration will be fully satisfactory.* (1) Christ has a right to enjoy the headship over it: "Whose right it is." He is not only the Son of David, and Heir to the old throne; he is the Son of God, vested with Divine rights. (2) Christ receives his kingdom from his Father (Phil. ii. 9—11): "I will give it him." (3) This restoration will not be a return to the old position. If it were so, the whole process would be a profitless cycle. But Christ's kingdom of heaven is infinitely better than David's kingdom of Israel.

HOMILIES BY VARIOUS AUTHORS.

Vers. 3—5.—*Undiscriminating infliction.* It is a pathetic spectacle, this of the prophet, in his exile away in the north-east, turning by Divine command his gaze, sorrowful and sympathizing, towards Jerusalem, the holy places, the land of Israel. The present is sad enough, but Ezekiel has to bear the oppressive anticipation of the future. He hears the assurance of the God whom his countrymen have offended by their infidelity that worse calamity, even disaster, and death are about to befall the remnant in Palestine. The sword is about to be drawn out of its sheath, and the righteous and the wicked alike are about to feel the keenness of its edge.

I. PROVIDENCE REGARDS A NATION AS HAVING A CORPORATE LIFE. Israel was a unity, and the scattered tribes were regarded by the King of nations as one people. It is the same with other communities. Every nation has its own national life, its own organic unity. Each subject or citizen is a member of the body, and his existence has meaning in this relation and all that it involves.

II. RECTORAL LAW ACCORDINGLY DEALS WITH A NATION AS A WHOLE. The inhabitants of the earth are under moral government and control, are subject to law and to the Divine Lawgiver and Judge. God is the God of nations. So much is this the case that political authority is represented in Scripture as being a Divine institution: "The powers that be are ordained of God." As Providence designs that men should live in communities, so God determines the discipline, the moral education, through which nations must pass. God is in history; which is uninteresting and meaningless unless his hand is recognized, and the operation of his rule observed with admiring reverence.

III. THIS PRINCIPLE INVOLVES THAT THE WICKED PARTICIPATE IN THE PROSPERITY, AND THE GOOD IN THE ADVERSITY, WHICH COME UPON A NATION. Individuals are not always in sympathy with the community of which they form a part. There are other currents in a stream beside its main flow. Broadly speaking, the nation which publicly and flagrantly violates the moral law undermines its own life and prepares the way for its own dissolution. When the catastrophe comes, those who have protested against the nation's sins, and have endeavoured to stem the torrent of unbelief and ungodliness, are carried away in the general destruction.

IV. SUCH RETRIBUTION DOES NOT, HOWEVER, AFFECT THE INDIVIDUAL MORAL PROBATION OF MEN. God deals with men upon general principles—according to broad, intelligible laws. We cannot see how it could be otherwise. Yet this seems to involve many cases of individual hardship, and even injustice. How can this be avoided? The Judge of all the earth will surely do right. How, then, can we explain the fact that—in the language of Ezekiel—the Eternal, with his sword, cuts off the righteous and the wicked?

V. THIS ARRANGEMENT IS EXPLAINED BY, AND HARMONIZES WITH, THE JUDGMENT AND RETRIBUTION OF A FUTURE STATE. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. The anomalies of the present state of being are such as to suggest that this is only a probationary state, that we do not now and here see the unfolding of the complete purposes of the Lord and Judge of all. The Scriptures reveal a state in which retribution and compensation shall be complete, as we know they are not here. The righteous and the wicked shall not always be confused in one common category, and consigned to one common doom. The discrimination which is not exercised now shall be exercised hereafter. Prosperous sinners shall not for ever elude the righteous judgment of God. The suffering and patience of the virtuous and pious shall one day be rewarded, not only by the approbation of the Judge, but by an everlasting recompense.—T.

Vers. 6, 7.—*The sign of sighing.* In the case of Ezekiel, perhaps more than in any other of the prophets, actions were adopted as prophetic signs, more effective than words. The tidings conveyed to the prophet, and through him to his fellow-countrymen, were of so mournful an import that such indications of mental distress as sighing and weeping were natural expressions of the feelings which he could not but experience. It was appointed for him in this way to excite the curiosity of his people, and, in response to their inquiries, to inform them of coming evils.

I. THE CAUSE OF THE PROPHET'S SIGHING. 1. The trouble which was about to come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and of the whole land of Israel, in the invasion of the country, the siege of the metropolis, and the violent death of many of the inhabitants. 2. The sinful rebelliousness of the people, by which they were bringing upon themselves these calamities and disasters. 3. Ezekiel's deep and sincere sympathy with sufferers, and his sorrow for their evil ways, so that he felt for his fellow-countrymen as he would have felt for himself.

II. THE SEVERITY OF THE PROPHET'S SIGHING. It was "with bitterness," "with the breaking of the loins," *i.e.* sighing shaking the whole bodily frame, and evincing the pungent distress afflicting his spirit.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHET'S SIGHING. 1. It was an evidence of patriotism; for Ezekiel himself was far from the scene of approaching retribution, and it did not affect him personally, but through his patriotic identification of himself with all that concerned his people. 2. It was an evidence of his faith in Divine assurances. There is no reason to suppose that mere political foresight enabled the prophet to anticipate the coming evil; yet he realized its certain approach with such intensity as to call forth the manifestation of feeling here described. 3. It was a warning to the careless and insensible. There were many for whom Ezekiel sighed who sighed not for themselves; yet theirs was the sin, and theirs the punishment now imminent. 4. It was a summons to repentance. If the prophet cried and sighed for the abominations wrought among the people, how much more did it become those who by their sins had provoked the anger of the righteous God to consider their ways, to weep because of their guilty ingratitude and persistent disobedience, and to flee from the wrath to come! how much more did it behove them to call upon the Lord that he might have mercy upon them, and upon their God who could abundantly pardon!—T.

Vers. 8—17.—*The sword.* Among the great powers that have affected human history must be reckoned the sword. As the emblem of physical force, of the superiority of the great of the world, it has special significance for the student of human affairs. The vision of the sword revealed to Ezekiel the impending doom of the land of Israel, and particularly of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. When he saw in imagination the glittering blade and the keen edge, his mind anticipated the awful fate which was about to overtake his afflicted and sinful fellow-countrymen.

I. THE SWORD IS THE IMPLEMENT OF HUMAN AMBITION AND VENGEANCE.

II. THE SWORD IS THE WEAPON OF DIVINE RETRIBUTION UPON THE NATIONS. Whilst it is unquestionable that wars and fightings come from human lusts, it is to the religious man, to the student of Scripture, equally plain that a Divine Providence overrules all the conflicts of the nations to accomplish wise purposes, and even purposes of benevolence. The Assyrian power directed its forces against the land of Israel, under the influence, doubtless, of human passions and purposes by which those passions were suggested. But Assyria, Egypt, Persia, and Rome were powers which the God of Israel employed to bring about the ends fixed upon by his own wisdom and faithfulness. As an instrument by which punishment was inflicted upon the idolatrous and rebellious, the sword was not only the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, but the sword of the Lord of hosts.

III. THE SWORD IS A SUMMONS TO HUMILIATION AND REPENTANCE. Ezekiel himself evidently regarded it in this light. He was directed to cry and howl, to smite upon his thigh, to smite his hands together, when he beheld in vision the weapon which was about to chastise his rebellious countrymen. There are minds which need to face the consequences of sin in order that they may admit the awfulness of sin itself. When the displeasure of the Almighty is revealed against the iniquities of men, they are sometimes roused to reflection and inquiry, and so it may be to repentance.

IV. THE SWORD IS THE SYMBOL OF THE POWER BY WHICH SIN IS SLAIN. The sons of Israel were not alone in the practice of sin, in ingratitude, and disobedience. Men in every age and in every place are found guilty of rebellion against the holy and righteous God. Well is it when they turn against their own sins the edge of the spiritual sword, when they attack their vices, their follies, their crimes, as the enemies of God, and, by slaying with the Divine weapon the rebellious forces, avoid the otherwise inevitable judgment and retribution which overtake the impenitent.—T.

Vers. 18—32.—*The impartiality of Divine justice.* Very picturesque and memorable is this portion of Ezekiel's prophecies. The prophet in his vision beholds the King of Babylon on his way to execute the purposes of God upon the rebellious and treacherous prince of Judah, and upon his partakers in sin. He sees him at some point of this expedition, standing on the north-east of Palestine, uncertain whether in the first instance to direct his arms against Rabbath, the capital of the Ammonites, or Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judah. He is at "the parting of the way," and calls to his aid, to help him to a decision, not only the counsel of the politician and the commander, but that also of the diviner. The bright arrows, on which the names of the two cities are inscribed, are drawn as in a lottery, the images are consulted, the liver is inspected by the augur. The prophet sees the resolve taken to proceed against Jerusalem; yet at the same time, he predicts that the children of Ammon shall not escape the edge of the glittering sword of retribution and vengeance.

I. DIVINE JUSTICE MAKES USE OF HUMAN AGENCIES OF RETRIBUTION, OFTEN THEMSELVES UNCONSCIOUS OF THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH THEY ARE EMPLOYED. The King of Babylon was appointed as the minister of righteous avenging upon both Judah and Ammon. Unawares to himself, he, in his military operations, was carrying out the predictions of God's prophets, and the decree of God himself. Infinite wisdom is never at a loss for means by which to bring to pass its own counsels and resolves.

II. DIVINE JUSTICE PUNISHES THE PRIVILEGED WHO ARE UNFAITHFUL TO THEIR PRIVILEGES AS WELL AS THOSE WHOSE PRIVILEGES HAVE NOT BEEN EXCEPTIONAL. Although the descendants of Abraham were selected from among the nations for a special purpose connected with God's plans for the moral government of the world, they were not thereby released from their righteous obligations, or from liability to punishment in case those obligations were repudiated. Israel's election did not secure exemption from the consequences of defection and rebellion. Rather was the guilt of the nation deemed to be aggravated by their neglect to use aright the many advantages with which they were favoured. On the other hand, the Ammonites were not secured against righteous retribution merely because they were less highly privileged than Israel. They had a measure of light, and they were responsible for walking in the light they enjoyed; and if they loved darkness rather than light, they secured their own condemnation.

III. DIVINE JUSTICE DECIDES WHICH GUILTY NATION SHALL BE CORRECTED, AND which shall be destroyed. Into the secret counsels of God it is not given us to enter. Facts are before us; and we see that, according to this prophecy, Ammon was committed as fuel to the fire, and was no more remembered; that the very name of the Ammonites vanished out of human history; and we see that the Jewish people survived, and were brought forth from the furnace into which they were cast. We can only apply to these facts our faith in the Divine righteousness, and hold fast by our conviction that in this, as in all his dealings with men, the Eternal Ruler has acted upon principles of unquestionable equity.

IV. Divine justice summons sinful nations to repentance and newness of life. These predictions and their fulfilment in history have been recorded for our instruction. What we read in Scripture is fitted to deepen within our nature the conviction that this world is under the righteous government of God. And we shall be foolish indeed if we do not infer from this fact the necessity of repentance and of renewal; if we are not led to welcome the assurance that for the penitent there is mercy, and for the lowly, life.—T.

Vers. 26, 27.—*The Divine reversal.* The judgments of God are not in vain. The sword is not sheathed until the purposes of infinite righteousness are achieved. War leads to such an end, to such a place, as eternal wisdom approves. No good end would be answered by Divine interposition, did all things go on as before. A Divine reversal crowns the work.

I. The historical fact. The primary reference of the prophet is doubtless to the downfall of the usurping, rebellious, treacherous, plotting prince of Judah, *i.e.* Zedekiah. His true policy lay in subjection to Nebuchadnezzar; instead of adopting and holding fast by this policy, he was ever endeavouring to free himself from the yoke, in the vain hope of independence. It was foreseen and predicted by Ezekiel that this should lead to his destruction.

II. The moral, governmental principle suggested by this fact. We learn that the Omnipotent Ruler is not indifferent to what happens among the nations, that he works in and through the ordinary laws of human action, and may sometimes work by extraordinary and exceptional means. Certain it is that his ways are not as men's ways. The great are often overthrown, and the feeble exalted, by the operation of his wise and merciful providence. God confounds all human policy and defeats all human expectations, exalts the low, and at the same time abases the high. The mitre and the crown are taken from the forehead of the powerful, and are placed upon the lowliest brows.

III. The typical and spiritual applications of this principle. There is a grandeur in this language which seems almost to compel its reference to greater events than those which happened in Jerusalem during the Eastern captivity. The kingdom of sin is mighty, and men have often felt how utterly vain it is to expect that kingdom to yield to any human attack. Ignorance and error, vice and crime, superstition and infidelity, have through millenniums of human history acquired over humanity a power which seems irresistible and invincible. But there is One "whose right it is" to reign, and he, the Son of God, has come in the flesh, and has come in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. In his favour, and in order to secure his universal conquest, his everlasting dominion, the Most High is overturning, ever overturning. He is the High Priest, the rightful King, of the humanity whose nature he assumed, and for whose salvation he died. The mitre and the crown are his of right, and to him they shall be given. Every usurper shall be defeated and disgraced; and Christ, whose right it is to reign, shall receive the kingdom, and his dominion shall have no end.—T.

Vers. 1—17.—*Irresistible slaughter.* The subject-matter of this prophecy is substantially the same as the foregoing. The parable is now put into plainest language. There is an advantage in using the parable method. It awakens attention. It leads men to examine and reflect. There is an excitement in discovering a riddle. Yet God will speak also to men in language plain enough for the simplest understanding. No lost man is able to cast any blame on our God. We have "line upon line, precept upon precept."

I. The scene of Divine destruction. God's righteous anger is directed against the Holy Land, the holy places, the temple itself. Kings and priests alike are doomed. Traditional eminence and renown are impotent as a defence against just retribution. God is no respecter of persons. Sin is equally detestable in an Israelite as in an Egyptian, and will be punished with equal severity. Out of regard for a good man, God may employ a different method—more patience, perhaps—in dealing with his son; yet, in the end, there will not be the deviation of a hair's breadth from righteous principle. No man can cloak himself with privilege.

II. God's vengeance irresistible. "I have set the point of the sword against all their gates, that their heart may faint." As Samson lifted off the gates of Gaza from their hinges, much more can Samson's Creator pierce with his sword gates of brass and fortresses of iron. Who can withstand his thunderbolts? Who can raise a defence against his lightning? "Every heart shall melt, and *all* hands shall be feeble." Did the antediluvians stop the rising of the Deluge? Could the families of Egypt protect their firstborn against the angel of destruction? Had the dwellers in Pompeii any power to prevent the overthrow of their city? How vain and impotent are men in league against an avenging God!

III. God's vengeance is thorough in its action. "I will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked." Man's estimate of righteousness and God's estimate differ widely. In a nation every variety of character will be found, and sin will exist in every shade and gradation. In comparison with the blackest characters some will appear righteous who are only less tainted with sin. These are the so-called righteous. In the very nature of things God will not and cannot treat alike the righteous and the wicked. The truth, then, set before us here is *this*—that the whole nation was corrupt, yea, ripe for slaughter. So few were the righteous, as to be left out in this graphic and impressive description. The scourge should sweep through the land, and penetrate every secret place.

IV. God's vengeance, though apparently, not really, indiscriminate. Outwardly the same calamity may befall the righteous and the wicked, while the real and inward effect differs widely. The same sentence of death will send the righteous to their heavenly rest, the wicked to their final doom. The sun that hardens clay, melts wax. The storm that sends a leaky ship to the bottom, drives faster home the tight and gallant bark. The scourge that kills the wicked, only chastens the righteous. The furnace that destroys the alloy, refines the silver. To the few righteous this visitation of God "is a trial" (ver. 13). The rod had not been severe enough, therefore the sword came. No ill can befall the righteous. Death is ours. "To die is gain."

V. Divine and human co-operation. This sword, which was sharpened to destroy, was no less God's sword, though it was wielded by the captains of Babylon. The prophet had his part to take. The king and statesmen of Babylon—yea, even the rank-and-file of the army—had their part to take, with God, in the execution of his just fury. The prophet is directed (ver. 14) "to smite his hands together"—a matter-of-fact prophecy of the coming event—the sign to summon the great army. And (in ver. 17) God describes himself as about to do the same act: "I will also smite *mine* hands together." Men are often called to act in God's stead—as God's delegates.

VI. Divine admonitions, through men, must be delivered with deep emotion. "Sigh therefore, son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes." If it be possible, on our part, to impress our fellow-men with the reality and severity of God's judgments, we must do our utmost to arouse earnest repentance, or we incur grave responsibility. God has constituted human nature so that strong emotion in the preacher, seemingly manifested, awakens strong emotion in the hearers. Men everywhere are susceptible of influence from a superior or a holier man. Nothing God allows us to omit which may serve to lead our fellows to repentance. We must make it clear that the events of coming retribution adequately impress our own minds; then, and then only, shall we arouse attention, promote inquiry, and lead to reflection, self-examination, and return to God.—D.

Vers. 18—27.—*The all-controlling providence of God.* We have here a striking instance of the superintending agency of God. From his invisible throne he controls all the plans, divinations, arts, and labours of kings and generals. All persons and all events are directed into the channel of his purpose, and aid in the final consummation of his righteous end.

I. **God uses even wicked men to do his work.** If he employed only righteous men, he would have to reject the service of the human species. There is a class of services which men render consciously and intentionally, and for which they obtain reward. They are blessed in their deeds. There is also a class of services which men render unconsciously and without intention. These have no excellence, and bring the doer no advantage. With his infinite skill God can turn all streams to work his mill. Sin shall be overruled to bring about a greater good. The wicked are God's hand.

II. **Heathen divinations are made to convey God's will.** The choice and will of men have a certain sphere in which to move freely. Yet, after all, they are but parts, minor parts, of larger machinery. Proud and presumptuous men may choose to go either east or west: they *think* they have their own way; yet, in the final result, it simply contributes to bring about God's way. The *ends* which some men seek, and which they often attain, are only means to an end in God's larger plan. The responses which foolish men imagine they obtain from heathen oracles or from human diviners are decrees and edicts from the unknown God. Nebuchadnezzar flattered himself that he had gained a splendid triumph in Judæa, while he was only doing servile work as a vassal of the King of kings.

III. **All military inventions and exertions serve the cause of God.** How instructive is it to perceive that all the martial preparations then about to be made by Nebuchadnezzar were all prearranged by God—all sketched in outline by his prophet! How this fact humiliates man! How it exalts God in our esteem! How small a thing, after all, is human ambition! Men who rail against God yet serve him. And if this fact is so transparently seen in the case of the King of Babylon, may we not conclude that this is a sample of every event in human life? As every atom in the mountains occupies the place allotted to it by God, so every event in human history fills a place according to God's purpose.

IV. **Wicked men, although employed as instruments for chastising others, become victims of God's displeasure.** "Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, thy day is come, when iniquity shall have an end." To unreflecting minds, the defeat of a king would seem a commonplace thing—a chance of war. Yet the hand of God is in the matter. "He setteth up one, and putteth down another." As a king has larger scope for evil or for good, so proportionately is his accountability. At the best, we see but a tiny fragment of God's method of rule; if we could comprehend the whole, we should admire the skill and power and beneficence of his vast administration.

V. **Subversion of human systems shall make for the establishment of righteousness.** "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it . . . until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." There is no question but that this Coming One is "Jesus Christ the Righteous." "Because he loveth righteousness and hateth wickedness," therefore his throne shall be for ever and ever. The only solid foundation for a throne is righteousness. The dynasty founded in might shall be demolished by a greater might. Mere power has an ephemeral tenure. The mightiest thing in heaven or earth is holiness. This is the thing that cannot be shaken: this shall remain. To-day the strongest kingdom upon the earth is the most righteous. "There shall be new heavens, and a new earth!" And what shall be their distinctive principle—their special glory? In them "dwelleth righteousness." The man of *right* is the man of *might.*—D.

Vers. 8—17.—*The sacred song of the sword.* "Again the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus saith the Lord; Say, A sword, a sword is sharpened," etc. The passage before us is written in the form of Hebrew poetry. The poem does not present any new truths or ideas, but is chiefly an amplification of the preceding twelve verses. There are in this song some words and phrases of considerable difficulty, in the interpretation of which a wide diversity of opinion exists. The chief features of the poem may be noticed homiletically in the following order.

I. **The preparation of the sword for slaughter.** 1. *It was sharpened for slaughter.* "A sword is sharpened . . . it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter." In the providence of God, Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean forces had become ready for their dread work at Jerusalem and among its inhabitants. 2. *It was furbished for terror.* "And also furbished, . . . it is furbished that it may glitter." The sword was burnished, that by its glittering it might dismay those against whom it was drawn (cf. Deut. xxxii. 41). The truth thus taught seems to be that the actual attack of the Chaldeans would strike terror into the hearts of the people of Jerusalem. Says Greenhill, "When God is bringing judgments upon a people, he will fit instruments for accomplishing of the same, and that to purpose. He will make that which is blunt, sharp; that which is rusty, glittering; and those who are spiritless, full of spirit; he can make one to chase ten, ten a hundred, and a hundred a thousand. His works shall never fail for want of instruments."

II. The presentation of the sword to the slayer. "He hath given it to be furbished, that it may be handled: this sword is sharpened, and it is furbished, to give it into the hand of the slayer." The sword was not prepared for nought. It was, as it were, given by the Lord into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar to be used by him. That monarch could not have slain one of the sons of Israel unless permission had been given him by the Supreme; and that permission would not have been given to him but for the heinous and long-continued sins of Israel. So also Pilate had no power against our Lord save what was given to him from above (John xix. 11). The mightiest sovereign or government can do nothing without the permission of the great God.

III. The victims of the sword in slaughter. 1. *It was to wage war against the chosen people.* "It is upon my people." (We have frequently noticed this point; *e.g.* on ch. xx. 46, and ver. 3.) 2. *It was to wage war against the most eminent of the chosen people.* "It shall be upon all the princes of Israel." These princes were strong advocates of the alliance with Egypt, and of resistance to the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. They did this in defiance of the word of the Lord by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and against the judgment of the weak-minded King Zedekiah, when he was in his better moods (cf. Jer. xxxvii. and xxxviii.). By this course of action they hastened the destruction of Jerusalem. It was fitting that, when the sword came, they should not escape its terrible strokes. And King Zedekiah is probably referred to by the prophet. "It is the sword of the great one that is deadly wounded, which entereth into their chambers" (ver. 14, Revised Version); or, "that pierces into them" (Hengstenberg); "that penetrates to them" (Schröder). His sons were slain before his eyes; then his eyes were put out; then, bound in fetters, he was carried to Babylon, and there in prison he died (Jer. lii. 8—11); surely the glittering sword pierced him. This sharp sword recognized no distinction of rank or riches, of place or power. 3. *It was to destroy the national existence of the chosen people.* "It contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree. . . . And what if the sword contemn even the rod? it shall be no more, saith the Lord God." The view of these difficult clauses which is taken by the 'Speaker's Commentary' seems to us correct. "The rod is the sceptre of dominion assigned to Judah (Gen. xlix. 10). The destroying sword of Babylon despises the sceptre of Judah; it despises every tree (comp. ch. xx. 47; xxi. 4; also xvii. 24)." And on ver. 13, "The Karlsruhe translator of the Bible gives the best explanation: 'What horrors will not arise when the sword shall cut down without regard the ruling sceptre of Judah?'"

IV. The execution of the sword in slaying. Several things in this poem are indicative of this. The thrice-doubled sword (ver. 14) points to the dread violence of the slaughter, or to "the earnestness and energy of the Divine punishment." The sword set against all their gates, and the multiplication of their stumblings (ver. 15, Revised Version), refer to the fierce conflicts by the gates of the city and the bodies of the slain there, over which the living would stumble. And two of the directions addressed to the sword in ver. 16 suggest the terrible work it was commissioned to accomplish. Revised Version, "Gather thee together;" margin, "Make thyself one;" Hengstenberg, "Unite thyself." The allusion is "to the thrice-doubled sword in ver. 14. In reality, the terrible weight is designated with which the Divine judgment falls on him whom it is to strike." Very similar in its signification is the direction, "Set thyself in array" (ver. 16, Revised Version). It denotes the determination and zeal with which the Divine judgment would be executed. All these things point to the terrible sufferings and the fierce slaughter of the guilty people of Jerusalem by the Chaldean hosts.

V. THE FEELINGS EVOKED BY THE SLAUGHTER OF THE SWORD. 1. *The sorrow of the prophet in anticipation of the slaughter.* "Cry and howl, son of man: for it is upon my people, it is upon all the princes of Israel: terrors by reason of the sword shall be upon my people: smite therefore upon thy thigh." Smiting upon the thigh was a token of intense grief, corresponding to smiting upon the breast (cf. Jer. xxxi. 19; Luke xxiii. 48). And the prophet was to do this, and to cry and howl, not simply to express his own grief, but to indicate the anguish which would wring the hearts of the people. 2. *The dismay of the people because of the slaughter.* "That their heart may faint," or "melt" (ver. 15; cf. ver. 7, and see our remarks thereon).

CONCLUSION. This terrible judgment was the expression of the righteous anger of the Lord God, because of the persistent and aggravated sins of the people. And when it was thus expressed, it rested. It was satisfied with the vindication of the holy Law, which had been so basely set at naught. 1. *Let no man, let no community, presume upon the patience and mercy of God.* He is a Being of awful justice and of terrible wrath. 2. *Let no one persist in sin.* Such a course must meet with the stern judgment of the Most High.—W. J.

Vers. 18—27.—*The approaching judgment.* "The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, Also, thou son of man, appoint thee two ways," etc. The following homiletic points are suggested by this paragraph.

I. THE DESTINATION OF THE APPROACHING JUDGMENT DETERMINED BY GOD, THOUGH THE AGENTS THEREOF WERE UNCONSCIOUS OF HIS INFLUENCE. "Son of man, appoint thee two ways, that the sword of the King of Babylon may come," etc. (vers. 18—22). The prophet is here summoned to make upon a tablet, or parchment, or other material, a sketch in which two ways branch out of one principal way—the one leading to Rabbath, and the other to Jerusalem; and at the head of one of the ways to make a hand, or finger-post, pointing to a city; and at the head of the two ways the King of Babylon employing divination to ascertain whether he shall proceed first against Rabbath or Jerusalem, and being directed to go to Jerusalem and besiege it. Thus he was to represent symbolically the judgment that was approaching Jerusalem from Chaldea. Notice: 1. *The use of superstitious means for obtaining direction in conduct.* "The King of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination," etc. (ver. 21). "Divination" is a general term. Three different kinds thereof are here mentioned. (1) "He shook the arrows to and fro." The method referred to was probably this: Three arrows were taken, on one of them was written "Jerusalem," on another "Rabbath," while the third was without any inscription. These arrows were placed in a helmet or in some vessel, which was shaken until one came out; if this one bore any name, to the place thus named the king must proceed; but if the arrow without an inscription first came out, they all had to be shaken again until one bearing a name came forth and indicated the course to be taken. (2) "He consulted the teraphim." "The teraphim were wooden images consulted as idols, from which the excited worshippers fancied that they received oracular responses" (cf. Gen. xxxi. 19, 30, 32, 34; 1 Sam. xix. 13). The mode of consulting them is unknown. (3) "He looked in the liver." Of animals offered in sacrifice the liver was looked upon as the most important part; and from an inspection of it, as to its size and condition, omens were drawn amongst several ancient nations. Nebuchadnezzar is represented by the prophet as feeling his need of direction as to whether he shall proceed first against Jerusalem or against Rabbath, and as using these modes of divination to obtain such direction. This need of our nature is recognized by God, and he has graciously provided for it (cf. Jer. x. 23; Prov. iii. 5, 6). 2. *The use of superstitious means controlled by God for the accomplishment of his own purposes.* Rabbath as well as Jerusalem had incurred the resentment of the King of Babylon. The antecedent probability was that he would first attack that place, seeing that it was somewhat nearer Chaldea than was Jerusalem. But God had determined otherwise, and accordingly the divination points Nebuchadnezzar to Jerusalem. "What a sublime proof," says Fairbairn, "of the overruling providence and controlling agency of Jehovah! The mightiest monarch of the world, travelling at the head of almost unnumbered legions, and himself consciously owning no other direction than that furnished by the instruments of his own blind superstition, yet having his path marked out to him beforehand by this servant of the living God! How strikingly did it show that the greatest potentates on earth, and even the spiritual wickedness in high places, have their bounds appointed to them by the hand of God, and that, however majestically they may seem to conduct themselves, still they cannot overstep the prescribed limits, and must be kept in all their operations subservient to the higher purposes of Heaven!" "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

"There's a divinity doth shape our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will."
(Shakespeare.)

II. THE DIVINELY COMMISSIONED ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE APPROACHING JUDGMENT TREATED WITH CONTEMPT BY THE FAVOURED PEOPLE. "And it shall be unto them as a vain divination in their sight, which have sworn oaths unto them: but he bringeth iniquity to remembrance that they may be taken." The meaning of part of this verse is difficult to determine. Many and various are the interpretations of the "oaths" here mentioned. Two of these, each of which seems to us probably correct, we adduce. 1. That they refer to the awful declarations of the coming judgments which the prophet had made to them, which he generally introduced by the solemn formula, "As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah" (ch. v. 11; xiv. 16, 18, 20; xvi. 48; xvii. 16, 19; xx. 3, 33). Notwithstanding the solemnity of these assertions, they looked upon the prophet's announcement of impending judgment "as a vain divination." 2. That they refer to the oaths of fealty which the Jews had sworn to Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xvii. 18, 19; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 13), and which they had so shamefully broken. Because they were his sworn vassals, they thought that he would not attack them. But he would call their iniquity to remembrance, and bring home to them their perjury by the stern punishment thereof. Whatever interpretation of the clause in question be adopted, it is clear that the Jews made light of the announcement of judgment by the prophet. While the Chaldeans accepted the directions of their divinations, and acted upon them, the favoured Jews treated the word of Divine inspiration "as a vain divination." And these same Jews eagerly accepted as true the messages of false prophets which assured them of peace and safety. They had so trifled with the truth of God that they had almost destroyed their moral capacity for recognizing it when it was proclaimed unto them.

III. THE INFLICTION OF THE APPROACHING JUDGMENT VINDICATED BY THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SINS OF THOSE UPON WHOM IT WAS COMING. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered," etc. (vers. 24—26). 1. *Persistence in sin leads to the discovery of their sins.* "Because ye have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are discovered, so that in all your doings your sins do appear." Their unbelief of the word of the Lord by Ezekiel, and their treachery towards Nebuchadnezzar, which led to their dread punishment, brought to light their other sins, showing the wickedness of their entire conduct. When thieves are "taken in some wicked acts," says Greenhill, "their former villanies come to light. As one sin begets another, so one sin discovers another." 2. *Persistence in sin leads to the punishment of their sins.* "Because that ye are come to remembrance, ye shall be taken with the hand. And thou, O deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel," etc. (vers. 25, 26). The people were to "be taken with the hand." God would deliver them into the hand of the Chaldeans, who would inflict upon them the dreadful judgments already predicted by the prophet—sword, famine, pestilence, captivity. The glory of the priesthood would be taken away; for the Lord God would "remove the diadem," or "mitre." The king would be carried into a miserable captivity, after enduring the most terrible sufferings (2 Kings xxv. 4—7), and the kingdom would be destroyed; for God would "take off the crown." Their most valued institutions would be overthrown. The then existing state of things would be destroyed. "This shall be no more the same: exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high." All would be brought to one melancholy condition of misery. National ruin was to be the penalty of national sin. Persistence in sin must ever lead to its just punishment. 3. *The manifestation of sin vindicates the punishment thereof.* It brings to light the justice of such punishment. That the Jews brought upon themselves the terrible sufferings which they endured at the hand of the Chaldeans was made unmistakably clear. And it was also shown that the terrible fate of the king was but the harvest of which he himself had sown the seed. In due season God himself will justify all his dealings with men.

IV. REVOLUTIONS IN HUMAN HISTORY LEADING TO THE ADVENT OF THE RIGHTFUL SOVEREIGN OF MAN. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: this also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Three points are suggested by this verse. 1. *The completeness of the national downfall.* The repetition of the "overturn" indicates the thoroughness of the destruction. No attempt to restore the kingdom to prosperity and power would fully succeed. 2. *The duration of the national downfall.* "This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is." The regal authority and the priestly dignity were not restored to the Jews. "As to the kingdom, Zerubbabel, the leader of the people after the exile, although of David's line, was no king on David's throne. But Herod, who becomes king over Israel, is of Edomite origin" (Schröder). There was a partial restoration of the functions of the priesthood after the return from Babylon, but it never recovered its former dignity and glory. For, as Fairbairn observes, "there was no longer the distinctive prerogative of the Urim and Thummim, nor the ark of the covenant, nor the glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; all was in a depressed and mutilated condition, and even that subject to many interferences from the encroachments of foreign powers. So much only was given, both in respect to the priesthood and the kingdom, as to show that the Lord had not forsaken his people, and to serve as pledge of the coming glory." 3. *The advent of the rightful Sovereign.* "Until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Undoubtedly these words point to the Messiah. They probably contain a reference to Ps. lxxii. 1, "Give the King thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the King's Son." He is the great High Priest. He is the divinely anointed King. Previous to his coming into our world all revolutions in human history were overruled by God to lead on to that event. And all subsequent revolutions, and all revolutions in the present, are being overruled by him for the establishment of his gracious rule over the hearts and lives of men throughout the whole world. "Of his kingdom there shall be no end." Thus in the declaration of dread judgments mercy was not forgotten by God. "Even now, when he is in a full career of overturning, he tells them of the coming of Christ, who should be their King, wear the crown, and raise up the kingdom again. This was a great mercy in the depth of misery; if they lost an earthly kingdom, they should have a spiritual one; if they lost a profane and temporal king, they should have a King of righteousness, an eternal King" (Greenhill). Even in wrath he remembers and exercises mercy.—W. J.

Ver. 27.—*Mundane revolutions.* "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it; and it shall be no more," etc.

I. THE CONTINUITY OF MUNDANE REVOLUTIONS. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." The Lord thus declares his determination to overthrow again and again the government of the Jews, until the coming of the Messiah, their rightful Sovereign. The words may also point, as Scott remarks, to "the repeated subversions of the Jewish nation by the Chaldeans, Macedonians, Romans, and many others to the present day; which will not come to any happy termination till they submit to their long-rejected Messiah. Nay, they seem to predict all the convulsions in states and kingdoms, which shall make way for the establishment of his kingdom throughout the earth." Revolutions in governments, in society, in science, have always been. They are rife at present. While men continue ignorant, selfishly ambitious, and wicked, they will continue. These overturnings will not cease until human character is radically altered, until it is fashioned after the Divine model. It is not one overturning, and then settled order and progress. In our world change succeeds change as wave follows after wave on the face of old ocean. Unsettledness characterizes all things here.

II. THE DIVINE AGENCY IN MUNDANE REVOLUTIONS. "Thus saith the Lord God . . . I will overturn, overturn, overturn it." These revolutions are not accidental; they do not occur by chance. They are brought about under Divine arrangements. God being the great "Ruler over the nations," they cannot take place, to say the least, without his permission. Being Supreme, all things are either originated or allowed by him. The sacred Scriptures assert this. "Neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the south, cometh lifting up. But God is the Judge. He putteth down one, and lifteth up another;" "He bringeth princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity;" "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will;" "His kingdom ruleth over all." He removes the leader of a nation's affairs, and disorder, disturbance, and immense change follow. He sends the light of truth to oppressed peoples, and they arise and claim their freedom. But what shall we say of dark and terrible changes? Let us take an example—the carrying of the Jews captive into Babylon. Whether we look at the sacred temple, or the celebrated city, or the fertile country, or the favoured people, how dark and sad it was! But look again. It saved the people, of whom the Messiah was to come, from idolatry, and so from utter ruin. Viewed in their Divine aspect, these revolutions are benevolent. Holy beings may advance calmly and evenly towards perfection. But disordered, sinful beings need great changes and rude shocks to banish hoary superstitions, and abolish cruel despotisms, and prevent ruinous inaction. While sin is here there must be unrest and change.

III. THE END OF MUNDANE REVOLUTIONS. "This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Until our Lord shall reign over the whole world, these revolutions will occur with greater or less frequency. But when he, the rightful Sovereign, shall take possession of the kingdoms of this world, these overturnings will for ever cease. The reign of the Christ precludes revolution. The character of his reign shows this. Under it the sacredness of human life will be practically recognized, and thus war will be precluded. Under his reign the universal brotherhood of man will also be practically recognized; and thus the cruel oppressions and base wrongs of man by man, which have often led to terrible revolutions, will be precluded. The reign of the "strong Son of God" is the sovereignty of his Spirit and principles in the hearts and lives of men; and these are entirely opposed to the crimes and ills which generate revolutions. His perpetual and universal sovereignty is founded upon his mercifulness and kindness, his justice and love (cf. Ps. lxxii. 11—17). Such a sovereignty is incompatible with revolution. Under it men will have neither cause nor occasion for anything of the kind. Animated and governed by his Spirit and principles, they will advance calmly and regularly towards perfection.

CONCLUSION. 1. *Our subject supplies an argument for promulgating the gospel of Jesus Christ.* International exhibitions, commercial interests, peace-treaties, political economics, can never bring about the abolition of revolution, because they are not able to curb and conquer the strong and stormy passions of evil men. The gospel of the Lord Jesus is the only power that can abolish revolution, and bring in a state of peaceful and blessed progress. When it is heartily accepted it becomes a power in the heart, making men true and righteous, pure and loving, and so promotes peace on earth and good will toward men. 2. *Our subject supplies encouragement for promulgating the gospel of Jesus Christ.* We see that painful changes, wicked and cruel persecutions, and criminal and sanguinary strife, are being graciously overruled to bring in the world-wide empire of him "whose right it is." All changes, all overturnings, are bringing his glorious universal reign nearer. Be encouraged, then, in your efforts to promote it. "Men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed;" "His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom from generation to generation."—W. J.

Vers. 28—32.—*The judgment of Ammon.* "And thou, son of man, prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord God concerning the children of Ammon," etc. The following points are presented to our notice.

I. THE CAUSE OF THIS JUDGMENT. This was threefold. 1. *They had provoked the anger of the Chaldeans by joining the coalition against them.* (Cf. ver. 20; Jer. xxvii. 2—10.) 2. *They had cast bitter reproaches upon the Jews.* "Thus saith the Lord God concerning the children of Ammon, and concerning their reproach." Reproach is injury by words; and it may be inflicted directly by reviling another, or indirectly by self-aggrandizement. The Ammonites reproached the Israelites: (1) By words. As Kitto remarks, they "were particularly loud and offensive in their exultation at the downfall, first of the kingdom of Israel, and then of Judah, with the desolation of the land and the destruction of the temple" (cf. ch. xxv. 3, 6; Zeph. ii. 8). It is probable that when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, the Ammonites upbraided the people of Judah that Jehovah their God had not protected them from his attack, while Moloch, which they worshipped as god, had not permitted the conquering monarch to attack their city, Rabbath. Reproach is a bitter thing, and hard to bear. David found it so, and said, "Reproach hath broken my heart." And it is a mean and cruel thing to inflict reproaches, especially upon the weak, the unfortunate, or the suffering. The Ammonites reproached the Israelites: (2) By deeds. Rabbath, their capital city, was situated "in the country east of the Jordan, and east of the possessions of the Israelites on that side the river. David, in his war with the Ammonites, took it from them, and annexed it to the territories of the tribe of Gad. . . . On the separation of the realm into two kingdoms, this, with all the territory beyond the Jordan, went to the kingdom of Israel; and when that kingdom was dissolved by the Assyrians, or rather, probably, when the tribes beyond the Jordan were first of all led into captivity, the Ammonites quietly took possession of their ancient territories, and apparently of something more" (Kitto). This seizure of a portion of the territory of the former kingdom of Israel is sternly denounced by the prophets (cf. Jer. xlix. 1, 2; Amos i. 13—15; Zeph. ii. 8). It was a practical reproach of the vanquished people. 3. *They had trusted in their diviners.* "Whiles they see vanity unto thee, whiles they divine lies unto thee." The Ammonites preferred false divinations to true prophets, especially as their diviners buoyed them up with vain assurances of their safety. If men will believe a lie, the lie will prove disastrous to them.

II. THE NATURE OF THIS JUDGMENT. 1. *Terrible slaughter.* "A sword, a sword is drawn: for the slaughter it is furbished, to cause it to devour, that it may be as lightning." The seer beheld a sword drawn for execution, sharpened for slaughter, and glittering so as to strike terror into those against whom it was drawn. The line, "To cast thee upon the necks of them that are slain," is rendered in the 'Speaker's Commentary,' "To give thee over to the heaps of the slain," and is thus explained: "'The necks of them that are slain' is simply a poetical expression for the slain, perhaps because the corpses were headless." It seems to indicate that the slaughter of the Ammonites would be so terrible that the slain would not lie apart, but in revolting heaps. The clause, "Thy blood shall be in the midst of the land," probably also points to the dreadful extent of the slaughter. 2. *Complete overthrow.* "Thou shalt be no more remembered." The ruin of the Ammonites was to be irreparable. Thus saith the Lord God to them, "I will cut thee off from the peoples, and I will cause thee to perish out of the countries" (ch. xxv. 7). Not until long after the time of Ezekiel was this part of the judgment executed, but in due season it was completely accomplished. "From the times of the Maccabees, the Ammonites and Moabites have quite disappeared out of history" (Hengstenberg).

III. THE AUTHOR OF THIS JUDGMENT. "I will judge thee, . . . and I will pour out mine indignation upon thee; I will blow upon thee with the fire of my wrath, and I will deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, skilful to destroy." God himself was the Author of this judgment. The sword was his, though it was wielded by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. By their sins the Ammonites had aroused the indignation of the Lord; and he would pour out that indignation upon them. 1. *That this judgment proceeded from him was a guarantee of its irresistibleness.* When he puts forth his hand to smite his obdurate foes, he breaks them as "with a rod of iron," or dashes "them in pieces like a potter's vessel." To attempt to resist him is utterly useless, vain, and ruinous. "Hast thou an arm like God's?" "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?" 2. *That this judgment proceeded from him was a guarantee of its righteousness.* "He loveth righteousness and judgment."

"His work is perfect;
For all his ways are judgment:
A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
Just and right is he."

IV. THE INSTRUMENTS OF THIS JUDGMENT. "I will deliver thee into the hand of brutish men, skilful to destroy;" margin, "burning men." So also Hengstenberg. Schröder, "consuming men." Thus the Chaldeans are designated. They are so called because they were to prepare "the fire," or because they were filled with glowing anger. They were the unconscious instruments accomplishing the purpose of the Lord Jehovah. Thus he made the wrath of man to praise him. He can never lack fitting instruments for the execution of his designs; for he can employ whomsoever and whatsoever he will.

V. The scene of his judgment. "In the place where thou wast created, in the land of thy birth, will I judge thee." They were not to be carried into captivity as the people of Israel and Judah were. In their own land they were to suffer the retribution of their evil doings. The scene of their sin was to be also the scene of their punishment. The Lord can find out the wicked anywhere; and no place can hide them from his judgments when the time for their infliction arrives. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them," etc. (Amos ix. 2, 3).

VI. The certainty of this judgment. "I the Lord have spoken it." The Ammonites deemed themselves quite safe when Nebuchadnezzar turned away from Rabbath, and went to besiege Jerusalem; and in their triumph they reproached the suffering people of Judah. But they had to learn that the postponement of their judgment was not its revocation; that their reprieve was not their pardon. Sentence against them here goes forth from Jehovah. Its fulfilment was rendered certain by both his power and his faithfulness. He is all-mighty. He "is not a man, that he should lie," etc. (Numb. xxiii. 19). And, according to Josephus ('Ant.,' x. 9. 7), in the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar made war against the Ammonites, and subdued them. "God's words of mercy and of judgment are alike sure."—W. J.

HOMILETICAL INDEX

TO

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